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LOCKERS

by Wallace West

WYVERNHOLD

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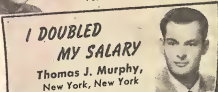
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Cover by Ed Emsb, symbolizing "The Time-Lockers"

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, August, 1956, published February, May, August, and November, by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy 25¢; yearly subscription \$1.00. Entire contents copyright 1956 by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelopes to insure return if not accepted, and while reasonable care will be extended in handling them, it is understood that they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in U. S. A.

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You've heard about time-saving devices, but suppose there were some sort of dingus through which you could actually save up time, like money. Well, that's how it was here; people snipped off time ordinarily spent in commuting, etc., until they had a month or so on deposit, then went off for a vacation on a parallel world where the time-rates were different. Their month was only equal to a day or so, here, you see. But what was the meaning of the dreams they had at night in vacation-land?

THE TIME-LOCKERS

Featured Novelet of Parallel Worlds

By WALLACE WEST

(author of "Moon Dance")

Illustrated by ESMH

ARNIE elbowed his way out of the Tubes, climbed a flight of littered, stinking stairs, and squinted at the trains basking like salamanders outside Hoboken's ancient station. His coat was a rag; his collar had wilted, and his shirt was soaked. In the glare, a six-foot thermometer advertised beer while proclaiming 98°.

Last summer... Arnie shuddered. But now... he turned toward a panel of steel grills adjoining the baggage lockers. Now...!

His heavy shoulders sagged. Every grill had an occupant, while a hundred commuters awaited their turns.

"Excuse me," said a voice. "You lookin' for a locker?"

"No use." Arnie mopped his face. "I'll have to brave the elements this time."

"Here's the real lowdown," said the nattily-dressed stranger. "There's a new panel behind them phone booths that most people ain't on to yet."

There *was* an unoccupied locker back of the phones. Arnie shoved his

identity-card into its maw, set the dial for 70 minutes, and pressed his forehead to the grill. The machine grumbled and stuck out its tongue in the form of a receipt. He looked toward the station bar, then, but decided against it; he had only three minutes in which to find a seat on the Lakeland Express.

Except for the sound of sizzling metal, the train was silent as he lumbered through. Here and there, some ultra-conservative perspired behind his Tellie or *Newark News*, but most of the commuters already were under.

Arnie found a seat in the forward car, shut his eyes, and leaned his head back. No sense getting a stiff neck watching that weird blur of scenery.

How much time did he have on deposit now?

The train leaped as if kicked in the rear. Air screamed past the windows. Mentally, Arnie reviewed the locker receipts in his wallet, remembering to deduct the "interest."

A voice shrieked; brakes ground; shadows flitted past his closed eyelids.

That last trip to the Coast had netted him 20 hours. . . .

The train plunged. That must have been Passaic—twelve miles, in the time it took to draw three long breaths. One hundred ten hours on deposit, Arnie decided; that was more than enough for a month of freedom from the office, from Muriel, from Suburbia, from a world gone humdrum.

"*Blh!*" squeaked the conductor as that stop-start routine was repeated. Patterson already?

No wonder Muriel grouched. She went into New York on the slightest excuse but, even so, she had managed to accumulate only ten hours during the past month.

"*Blh!*" Towaco? Or was it Boonton?

Well, Muriel had the children, and her painting, and the twice-mortgaged house. Why nag *him*? "*Blh!*" Just because he got an extra two weeks now and then. "*Blh!*" Muriel didn't have to commute, or stand for Old Sander-son's "*Blh!*" Pretty soon he'd have to tell her. . . .

"Dover!" sang out the conductor. "All out for Dover!"

Arnie stretched, donned his almost-dry coat, and lurched down the aisle. God bless the time-locker people on a day like this; greatest boon to humanity since the invention of fire.

Arnie, Jr., and Tommy—small savages in shorts—propelled him down the platform and into a convertible that Muriel had parked in the line of traffic. Disdaining outraged horns, she moved over to let her husband squeeze behind the wheel, further compressed him by pushing the left seat forward so the children could swarm in, and gave him a chaste peck. "Have a nice rest on the train?" she cooed. "This is the first time I've sat down today."

ARNIE STOLE a glance at her cool immaculateness, and ground mental teeth. If only. . . but what was the use? Muriel couldn't help playing the role of harassed housewife that she

had learned to perfection by endless perusal of the women's magazines. Come hell or the C-bomb, she would remain Mrs. Suburbia—lovely, sleek, frigid, and endlessly on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"When do the Northrups arrive?" Arnie sneaked through a red light.

"Sevenish; but I do hope they'll be late—I have to fix the salad. And Arnold, please." She laid a perfectly-manicured hand on his arm. "Only one cocktail before dinner; you know how you are."

Yes, he knew how he was when bores were abroad. He hadn't met Mrs. Northrup, but he had no illusions. Whatever had possessed Muriel to invite them?

"Dr. Northrup spoke to me after church," she answered with that uncanny telepathic response wives display. "He's worried about the time-locker impact on people's morals. (You really should go to church, dear. People are beginning to talk.) Well, since your Agency has the locker account, I thought. . ." She looked at him brightly in her favorite role of helpmeet.

"Umm." He leaned forward to help the car over the crest of the hill on which roosted their glass-and-fieldstone home.

"The Council is considering a petition to have lockers installed in Dover. Dr. Northrup says he'll support it—if you can prove they're harmless."

"Where in Dover?" he asked. "You have one in the station already."

"Oh. . . Laundermats, for one place."

"And schools, maybe?" Jr. suggested down his father's neck.

"Sunday schools," Tommy amended.

"In homes, too, for when you're so tired you can't sleep," Muriel rushed on.

"What if the house caught fire while you were under?" Arnie exploded as he swung the car under its port.

"Oh!" Muriel's eyes rounded in the little-girl way that had confused him into a proposal. "Well, I was just men-

tioning things that were suggested at the bridge club. The girls feel there should be *some* way for us to use them."

"Girls!" His sons having flushed like quail when the car door opened, Arnie stacked himself with groceries and clumped toward the kitchen.

"It's not nice of you to say that that way, dear." Muriel tripped beside him. "Just because we're tired of being T-L widows... Be careful with the vegetables, when you put them down. I picked them out myself, because Mrs. Northrup is so finicky about food."

As he dumped the bags savagely into the sink she hastened on: "Not that I'm criticizing, dear. I know that the time you save on that horrid train allows you to get a lot of work done on your play... but I can't get used to the idea that people can save time the way they do money. Dr. Northrup thinks it may be hypnotism, or something."

"Did you feel hypnotized the time you went to Tempora with me?"

"Nooo. But it was kind of dreamy." She gave him the first smile of the afternoon. "It was like going to a hotel in the Bahamas, meeting nice people, spending more money than one should, and getting home almost in time to see oneself starting out. It was real, all right; but still..." He prepared himself for the needle. "How much work *did* you get done last time you went there?"

"Oh, the first act's shaping up fine."

"You've been saying that for a year." The smile crystalized. "You must keep busy at something, though, because you lose so much weight when you're on Tempora. Tell me..."

Arnie looked at his wrist watch.

"Oh, very well!" (How soon, he wondered, would she learn to flounce?) She went in search of the boys, after giving him a look that left him as wilted as the vegetables in the sink.

ARNIE THOUGHT furiously as he showered, dressed, and returned to the kitchen to mix drinks while Muriel

tossed salad. As a junior—but promising—public relations executive, it was his business to feel pulses, read wall handwriting, and lead thoughtleaders. Here was a revolt in the making; managed properly, it might snag him a vice presidency.

Well, *why* restrict the use of time-lockers? he asked himself as he marshalled gin, vermouth and equipment. (If guests weren't civilized enough to appreciate martinis, they could drink sherry!) Why not let insomniacs and convalescents telescope their miseries, for example? In that case, T-L revenues would increase. So would its need for public relations... or would it? Relax the rules and the public mightn't need relating. Congressmen might decide to "lock" through filibusters and judges through boring cases. What about convicts? He caught a vision of the whole world letting work go hang, and dropped a glass.

He denuded a lemon on momentum, then, feeling Muriel's mind's eye upon him, got brush and dust pan from the pantry.

At that moment Jr. and Tommy triumphantly escorted Northrups into the kitchen; Muriel controlled her outrage, and made welcoming noises. Arnie, on his knees, straightened with a grunt and found himself almost eye-to-eye with Mrs. Northrup. She was raven-haired, startlingly blue-eyed—under 30 he guessed expertly—and as unlike her pompous blond husband as chickadee to jay.

"Dancing bear act." He lumbered to his feet. "Good for the figure."

"If I were a bear, and a big bear, too," this remarkable mite quoted, "I shouldn't much care if it froze or snow."

"As long as you had a little bit of butter to your bread," he grinned down at her, entranced.

"Priscilla! Really! This is my wife, Mr. Davis, although she behaves more like my daughter." Dr. Northrup en-

folded Arnie's hand. "Excuse our barging in; the little children led us..."

"So one of your calling naturally had to follow." Arnie looked to see if his hand actually was covered with flour. "How about a drink, now that you're here?"

"A small sherry, perhaps."

"Make mine martini," said the minister's better half, "and just twist lemon peel over it...high up."

"Seven-to-oner?" Arnie sniffed a kindred spirit.

"In-and-outer, Mr. Davis, if you don't mind."

"I," said Muriel, "shall have plain ginger ale."

"Is there another kind?" Arnie sighed.

Dinner went better than he had expected. The boys were reasonably subdued. Muriel's coin-metal silver and Spode distracted attention from a menu lifted verbatim from the *Ladies' Home Companion*. And Priscilla was good to look at.

After the children had been forced into their beds, three of the others got down to business over brandy and coffee in the library. (The fourth prowled through Arnie's books, an occupation that displayed her uncorseted little figure to advantage.)

"The thing that frets me most about the growing time-locker craze," Dr. Northrup began, after dominating a burp, "is that it soon may leave no period of the day or night free for spiritual contemplation..."

"...or for TV," his wife supplemented without glancing up from a first edition of "The Connecticut Yankee."

"There's practically unlimited time for contemplation when one arrives on Tempora," Arnie smiled. "All leading sects maintain chapels in the Portal Hotel."

"Ah, yes; a telling point. But where is Tempora?"

"Well," Arnie marshalled all his powers of obfuscation, "it..."

"It isn't really anywhere," Priscilla

crooned, "It's sometime else instead."

"If you *must* quote Milne," groaned her husband, "do quote him correctly."

"But she's right." Arnie leaped at the proffered gambit. (Where had this woman been all his life, as if it mattered now?) "Tempora is a duplicate Earth that comes whizzing along the spacetime groove a few seconds behind his planet. Physically, the two are identical except that Tempora is largely pastoral and that time, there, moves approximately ten times faster than it does here."

"Faster?" Muriel frowned helpfully. "You mean slower?"

"NO. THERE is a paradox involved. The reason lockers are possible is that, exactly three minutes after a person makes a deposit of a certain length, his psyche is switched onto the Temporan time-stream."

"Real daylight saving," Priscilla agreed, as she laid aside a Priestley novel.

"Right. When said person returns to Earth's time-stream at the end of a 50-minute train trip, let us say, he has saved 40 minutes."

"Forty-five minutes," Muriel corrected.

"In a sense." He could have murdered her. "But you forgot the 10% time-interest the Temporans charge for their service. With it removed, our passenger has 40 minutes left to his credit in the locker account. But when he takes a vacation trip to Tempora, with its faster time, something even more wonderful happens; his 40 minutes is multiplied by ten, and amounts to some seven hours."

"All that is Sanskrit to my simple mind," said Priscilla as she put "The Serial Universe" back on its shelf. "Say it in English."

Arnie had once written a Questions & Answers booklet for the Agency on this very point, so he answered smoothly. "The first thing for all of you to understand is that objective spacetime

and subjective time are very different things, as Einstein was the first to point out. Because the planetary movements of both Earth and Tempora are governed by the same objective space-time, for example, they can never collide.

"The second thing to remember is that boredom has an amazing way of stretching subjective time while intense interest compresses it. Thus a dull one-day train trip may actually be longer, subjectively, than a delightful two-week vacation. The lockers merely provide us with a practical method for collapsing that train trip to its proper dimensions, and using the time we thus save for more pleasant pursuits. It's really just a vast improvement on the office 'coffee break'."

"Yes, yes—of course," Northrup said promptly. "A very lucid explanation. It leaves two questions in my mind, however. The first is: Are Temporans the kind of beings with which we want to associate? Now don't misunderstand; I am not a chauvinist..."

"Some of his best friends play golf on Sunday."

"Priscilla! I mean that it's at least conceivable that Temporan morals—or, ah, system of government, might not, ah..."

"My Agency would never have taken the time-locker account," said Arnie, "had there been the slightest doubt in our minds as to Temporan integrity."

"The Temporans I met looked and acted human," Muriel said. "They are shorter than us, darker, and slighter in build. There's something almost child-like about them, too; they are simply fascinated by the advertisements in American magazines."

"At one time, Tempora had quite a high state of civilization, as well as a much larger population than at presents," her husband added. "They don't have the manpower to keep many industries running, so naturally they're intrigued by our consumer goods."

"Perhaps they plan to invade us, and

seize those goods," the minister proposed.

"It would take lots of manpower—plus an advanced economy—to occupy even a beachhead on an alien plant. Tempora doesn't have the manpower. As for technology, they don't employ atomic fission—to say nothing of fusion; they get what little power they use from the sun."

"Sunworshippers," Priscilla sniffed. "Like the Incas. Let's invade *them*."

NORTHROP frowned in her direction and went on: "My second question relates to this 10% interest they charge for using time-lockers; what do they want our time for?"

"Frankly," said Arnie frankly, "I don't know what they want it for, or how they can possibly use it. They argue that our banks charge interest when they lend money, so they were entitled to make a similar charge. It seems a reasonable demand in view of the fact that, in return, they are providing us with something approaching immortality."

"Us!" Muriel finally broke loose. "Maybe the lockers bestow immortality on travelling salesmen and commuters, but what about poor stay-at-homes in suburbs?"

"*'This life of mortal breath is but a suburb of the life elysian whose portal we call Death'*", Priscilla intoned, while Arnie choked on his drink. "The way time dozes in Dover, I'd say we housewives already are one jump from being immortals."

"Priscilla! One does not joke about such things!"

"It's no joke, John; ask any member of the Bridge Club. Oh!" She clapped her hands in delight. "*That's why!*"

"That's why what?"

"That's why they call it bridge; it spans interminable afternoons and evenings. Why don't we play bridge in the mornings, too? It would be ever-somuch fun."

"I'll speak to Mrs. Burlington about it this very week," said Muriel.

"You, uh, girls talk as if lockers were made just to relieve your boredom," Arnie said.

"That's what *you* use them for," Muriel was at him in a flash.

"Nonsense. With you, and the children, and the house...and..."

"And bridge," Priscilla supplied, "we really have a jolly time. Fact is, we have no use for your silly lockers. Why don't you, uh, boys go to Tempora... or Tophet, for all we care...and let us get back to our game. That would give this mauled old Earth a chance to comb the sewage out of her rivers, and the mushrooms out of her clouds."

"What about the kids?" As he refilled their two glasses, Arnie wondered why he didn't resent this child-woman who was crabbing his act.

"They'd manage. Children look on adults as interfering nuisances, anyway."

"I meant," Arnie dared, "those that people haven't had yet."

"Oh them! Well, once a year we'd invite you to come home, and have a wild party like the Greeks used to."

"Priscilla!" Dr. Northrup tried to tower. "I'm taking you home. I must apologize for my wife's vulgarity, Mr. and Mrs. Davis; alcohol affects her like that. I warned her to have only one drink."

"Exactly what I told my husband," Muriel cried. "When he's had three he *talks* like a libertine. Please don't go, Doctor," she floundered on. "It was so nice..."

"Until I started booting the mores around," said Priscilla, unabashed. "I should never have married a minister; thought I could reform him. Don't get up, Muriel. I'll find my coat. And you will speak to Mrs. Burlington, won't you?"

She swept out, trim calves twinkling.

"You simply ruined everything again," Muriel wailed as the front door closed on their visitors. "You never fail

to insult the very people who could help you. I'm sick of it; one of these days I'll walk out and never come back."

THE EUPHORIA that Arnie had been feeling turned to a bitter taste; he was tempted to relax the tension by engaging in another of those furiously-restrained quarrels. ("If you *must* say such beastly things, keep your voice down so you won't wake the children.") But he was too anxious to learn more about Mrs. Northrup.

"If you really want a divorce," he said quietly, "I think it can be arranged."

"Oh, I didn't mean that." Her voice lost its stridency as she dabbed at her eyes. "It's just that you never say the kind of things to people that other people say; you poke into their minds until they get upset and angry."

"Priscilla... Mrs. Northrup didn't seem upset."

"She's just like you—always making people think. *Think! Think! Think!*" She stamped her foot like a magazine serial heroine. "Don't I have enough to do without thinking all the time?"

"Is she as subversive as all that?" The bitter taste was receding.

"Well—no, she's not, usually." Muriel's fine grey eyes were puzzled. "You should see what she's done for Dr. Northrup's church, and our bridge club."

"How did she happen to team up with such a stuffed shirt?"

"Met him at a seminar, I understand."

"He's scared of her, underneath."

"We all are a little, I guess." Muriel shook her golden head slowly. "I wish I knew more about her background. Sometimes..."

"Sometimes you think she might be a Temporan spy?"

"How did you know I was thinking that?"

"We'd have a lot in common if you'd let us," he grinned ruefully. "Now tell me about Dr. Northrup; he's been min-

ister at Third First for two years. Right?"

"Yes, but the first year really didn't count. Then he got married..."

"And males started going to church in droves. Hmmm. Maybe I should drove, too."

"Now look here, Arnold Davis!"

"Pooh. I like a tall blonde with a hinge in her middle."

For a second Muriel dimpled before snapping back into character. "I'm not sure I like that remark," she said primly.

"Sorry." He splashed brandy into his glass.

"Arnold! You've had more than enough. You should go to bed."

"If you had said 'come to bed' I would; as it is, I'll read a while."

He selected Durant's "Life of Greece" and thumbed through the index.

"How do you spell *Dionysius*, Muriel... the god who threw those wild parties?"

2

ARNIE CRAWLED to the office in his Monday mood. Over the weekend, he had hit his thumb while trying to repair the automatic mower; had cut acres of lawn with the ancient power mower; had refereed a Little League game—during which Jr. struck out five times; had tried his best to live up to the S. E. P. image of a Perfect Husband and Father. Now he was ready to bite.

He wore a shirt to match his blues, so his secretary treated him with deference. "Client," she whispered over a stack of unsigned mail. "Time-tantrum, I think."

"Again!" He corrected a misspelled word with a flourish.

A rumble of voices from Old Sanderson's office rose to a roar. This was followed by a squawk from the box on Arnie's desk; he made a stab at

straightening his tie and answered the summons.

"What's this?" Sanderson bellowed without preamble as he pointed to a pile of paper stubs littering his teak, chrome, and plastic desk.

"What's what?" Arnie managed, conscious that the Client—in the person of a sleek, blackhaired Temporan named Mr. Xotl—was studying him with disfavor.

"These receipts, Davis; these receipts! They're phony."

The junior executive picked up a stub and turned it foolishly.

"The IBM rejected these at the Portal yesterday. Serial numbers wrong! Forgeries! The holders insist they're genuine. Threaten to sue! Well...?"

A picture of the too-well-dressed stranger at Hoboken formed in Arnie's mind.

"Remember the racket that petty gangsters used to work with railway station baggage lockers?" he asked, and went on to describe his encounter. "Some lockers must have been rigged to hand out forged receipts to customers, and retain the good ones for collection by the riggers. We'll soon put a stop to that."

"How?" asked Mr. Xotl.

"Periodic inspection; electric eye installations—that sort of thing."

"You forget several other things." Old Sanderson wiped sweat from his bald pate. "One: Unfavorable publicity. (The TV boys will have a field day with this.) Two: The indemnity we must pay to subscribers who've been robbed. Three: The Client's reaction. My. Xotl tells me his government fears an invasion. Threatens to close the Portal, or..." his voice broke, "or cancel our Contract, and employ S. S. Q. & C."

"Tempora will never get the service we give them out of poor old S. S. Q. & C.," said Arnie with hearty confidence. "As for invasion—that's ridiculous."

"Why?" asked Mr. Xotl.

"An invasion by gangsters?" Arnie laughed, but the sound was hollow. The old New York-Miami-Los Angeles gangster axis—using stock manipulation as it once had employed tommy guns—held more power than he wanted to admit to a foreigner.

"Can we...?" Old Sanderson fumbled. "Can't we...?"

"Of course we can, Frank!" Arnie lunged at that opening with a deftness worthy even of Muriel's admiration. "I know exactly what you have in mind. Keep this thing off TV; swear the reporters, and the holders of forged stubs, to secrecy on the ground that an investigation is being made."

"No!" said the Temporan.

"Of course, there must be an investigation, Mr. Xotl," Arnie whirled on him. "Then we'll have the government investigate the investigators, and stall some more. Meanwhile, since all that the crooks needed to get into Tempora were their locker receipts, they're probably there right now."

"Living in the lap of luxury at my expense!" snarled Old Sanderson.

"But they can't stay indefinitely; they don't have enough receipts. When they have to come home, they'll find that not only have we de-rigged the machines, but we have established a new policy that all persons returning through the Portal must show their identification tags as T-L subscribers. Right there's where we nab the forgers and make 'em pay through the nose."

"Arnie!" That use of his first name was the supreme accolade.

"**T**HAT BEING settled," said Mr. Xotl, "I wish to bring up one other matter: We find that a disproportionate number of visitors to Tempora are males. This raises serious problems in the matter of, ah, entertainment; we must insist that the sexes of visitors be equalized."

"I've been working on that." Arnie

beamed and outlined the proposal for locker installations in Suburbia.

"But," Mr. Xotl demurred, "the people you speak of live in most charming surroundings, and enjoy all cultural advantages. They must be happy, busy persons with little need for the escape offered by our lockers."

"Most suburbanites are neither happy nor busy," Arnie said. "They have fled from towns largely because they refuse to accept the civic responsibility of making those towns decent places in which to live and raise children. They retreat to their split-level mansions in the hills, drink too much, crack bad jokes, play terrible golf, dunk themselves in swimming pools, and make passes at their neighbors' husbands or wives."

"Really, Arnie, you exaggerate," Old Sanderson began, then subsided as a picture of his life in Pelham rose before his eyes.

"Appalling," said Mr. Xotl.

"Then," Arnie continued, "untold thousands of suburbanites have reached thousands of suburbanites have reached 50—now the compulsory retirement age. They have 20 good years left, and nothing to do except putter or get into mischief."

"As for kids, since the coming of automation they have to have M. A.'s or Ph. D.'s to find jobs. America has turned into a perpetual kindergarten and nursing home. Everyone's bored stiff, Mr. Xotl, and..." honesty overcame him utterly, "and a bit frantic."

"Amazing!" the Temporan breathed. "While on Tempora every man, woman and child works until he drops trying to patch up a civilization that we foolishly tore to bits."

"Well, gentlemen," he continued, "Tempora will not take its business to S. S. Q. & C., after all. May I borrow your pen, Mr. Sanderson? I want to write an approval for those suburban lockes." He scribbled, rose briskly, straightened his immaculate but shabby

tunic, and departed as silently as a shadow.

"Arnie, my boy," said Old Sanderson, "I've been doing some thinking."

"Yes?" The other began to sweat hopefully. "Yes, Frank?"

"About the vice presidency; Timmons retires next month, you know."

Did Arnie know!

"I'd been considering Mac very seriously, but I don't think he's quite ready. Besides, his connection with our toilet tissue account might..."

"It just might." Arnie tried to look sad.

"So it seems to be you, Arnie." Old Sanderson slapped the fat man's shoulder. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I," said the future Davis of Sanderson and Davis, "need a martini."

"Xotl always makes me thirsty, too," said his boss. "And that reminds me." He felt in his breast pocket and swore. "That gook walked over with my fountain pen again. Well—it can't be helped, so why don't we head for the bar? It's almost eleven."

THE WEEK after lockers were installed in Dover, Arnie approached the Third First Rectory like a skittish draft horse. The temperature still hovered above 90, but Muriel had insisted that some crisis in the Northrup household necessitated the visit, even though their home was not air-conditioned.

Once inside the tree-shaded, high-ceilinged place Arnie found himself becoming cool and comfortable, without having to submit to that icy shock which customarily turned his wet shirt into a winding sheet. On the screened-in porch—overlooking a big, beautifully-kept vegetable garden—a rattan chair straight out of a rummage sale complained bitterly against his weight. But it proved a soothing relief from Muriel's modernities.

Dinner consisted of martinis laced with Waldorf salad.

"I'm not much on cooked victuals,"

Mrs. Dr. Northrup explained, airily after a look at Arnie's promising paunch. "Besides, we shouldn't steak out our graves."

"*it is a cheering thought to think that god is on the side of the best digestion*," Arnie quoted wistfully.

"Oho! A man who remembers archie!" Priscilla chortled. "For that *'i love you as new englanders love pie.'* Which reminds me..." She whisked into the kitchen and returned with a Pie. "This will remedy any caloric deficiency. I picked the cherries, pitted them with my own lily fingers, and made it like Mother."

"But isn't it simpler to dial for pie?" Muriel, who had been posing in pale blue organdy, teetered between admiration and outrage.

"Taste and see."

"How do you *ever* find the time?"

"Simple. I have no TV, no swimming pool, no servants to boss, and no dial connection with the supermarket."

"And no children," Muriel said sweetly.

"Quite! To quote archie again; '*for a territory the size of the united states five millions of people would be about right.*' Instead of the 200 million we have milling, because brats are about the only things left to create."

"Priscilla!"

"Let me finish, husband: '*if the world were not so full of people... there would be more time for them to get out and lie on the grass, and there would be more grass for them to lie on.*'"

"A perfectly outrageous statement," sighed the minister. "But that's not what I asked you folks over here to discuss.... I have been refused a transport to Temporal!"

Arnie failed to look sufficiently surprised.

"The enormity of it," said Priscilla with a half-sob. "Pillar of society rejected while flibbertigibbet wife has welcome mat spread. Arnie, did you know that the original flibbertigibbet

was a small fiend just like me? She's mentioned in 'King Lear'."

"Tempora is concealing something!" Northrup pounded table. "I intend to ferret it out."

"Why?" asked Arnie between bites.

"Why. Why? *Why!* That's what the Temporan counsel kept saying at me. If there's one word I've come to hate, it's 'why' said in that superior fashion. Why? Because I'm an American citizen, that's why. I have the right to go wherever I please—subject," he amended quickly, "to State Department approval."

"And you won't get that," said Arnie. "I'm sorry, Doctor; I pulled every string that dangled to get you admitted. Went right up to their ambassador. He explained that you are an original type... yes, those were his very words, an 'original type' who would be difficult to replace in our society, if anything should happen to you on Tempora."

"Well, if that's the case..." Northrup preened.

"Look, Doctor," said Arnie with studied matter-of-factness, as he sipped an excellent cup of coffee, "since you can't go, why not send your wife there to look things over for you."

"I'm the expendable type," Priscilla agreed.

"She could accompany Muriel and me, when we go over in late September."

"Oh, Pris will be much too busy with her church work to accumulate enough time by then," Muriel purred.

"So true." The minister's wife tapped her full red lips thoughtfully. "Oh... I know how it might be managed, Muriel dear. I'll ask the girls to let me be dummy at all of our bridge parties from now until then."

"So it's settled," said Arnie. "I'll introduce you to the Temporans, and show you around; you can draw your own conclusions."

"But your play, dear," cried Muriel.

"You were planning to finish it next time, remember?"

"There'll be plenty of time for everything, honey. Everything."

3

ARNIE, Muriel, and Priscilla finally reached the head of a long line of vacationers that threaded across the impressive waiting room of New York's Portal.

The IBM clucked approvingly over their heaps of stubs and stamped their transports. Redcaps grabbed their bags, lugged them to a door in the futuristic clock face that filled one whole wall, chucked them through, and held out their palms. Arnie crossed the palms with silver, then escorted the women through the door.

They felt a tug of vertigo—as when riding a plane that strikes an air pocket—and staggered out upon a carpet so thick that it entrapped their shoes.

"Oh, no!" cried Priscilla as she fought her billowing dress. "There's been a mistake; this is some horrid hotel in Miami Beach."

"It's what the tourists ordered," Arnie said complacently.

Identical redcaps scooped up the luggage. They followed across a pink and gold lobby, past a picture window looking out on miles of surf, to an endless registration desk.

"Ah, Mr. Davis, back after so long," cried a dark vision. "And Mrs. Davis!" How delightful. And...? The clerk looked dubiously at Priscilla.

"Princess Thuvia of Barsoom traveling incognito."

"You joke." The clerk emitted a tinkle of synthetic mirth. "Princess Thuvia is a character..."

"And so am I."

"We shall register you, then, as Mrs. John Northrup of Dover, N. J. Will that serve?"

"No; you shall not register me at all. I don't like this dump."

"Why, Prisl!" gasped a scandalized Muriel. "This is the very swankest hotel on Tempora; you'll love it."

"I'll love a motel better. Or a cabin on the beach, ten miles from nowhere. Can you recommend such a place, Miss?"

"Look, Priscilla," said Arnie as the clerk scurried off in search of information, "if you want to meet people..."

"You call these cardboard cutouts *people*?" The girl sniffed as she surveyed the self-consciously well-dressed self-consciously gay crowd that thronged the lobby. "I've met them all in Suburbia. Besides, I don't have the clothes or money to make a holy show of myself—and don't either of you go making generous offers. You heard the clerk; I'm a character, in spite of hell."

"There is such a place as you require," said the clerk. "A lodge—up the beach about 20 miles. You needn't dress for dinner, or even wear swim suits; it's patronized largely by the, uh, natives."

"Sold," said Priscilla. "Order me a coach and four. Well, goodbye, folks."

"Hold on," said Arnie; "we're going to the lodge, too."

"But," wailed Muriel, "all the things I brought."

"We'll come here for dinner and dancing," he soothed her.

"Just as you say, Mr. Davis," sighed the clerk. "Your boat will be around in half an hour. Be very sure to keep your doors locked up there."

"I THOUGHT," mused Priscilla, as she leaned winsomely over the rail of a small cabin cruiser that was speeding them silently northward, "that you said Tempora was a 'have not' world. But see how they're enlarging that monster. Where do they get materials and manpower for such frills?"

Arnie looked back at the Portal Hotel. It sprouted unfinished battlements, and faery towers on all of its wings. With Muriel in the cabin—feel-

ing seasick, and sorry for herself—he had hoped to talk of other things.

"Temporans have plenty of scrap," he said. "They had to revert to a village economy after an atomic war about a generation ago. The entire planet is a scrap pile. I'll show you one of their abandoned cities pretty soon."

"As for manpower, many Terrans who used to be skilled workmen before Automation are delighted to handle tools again while they're here. It's a change from watching dials and punching buttons; gives 'em a chance to make a buck, too. They need all the money they can scrape together to keep ahead of us middle class Jones' in the casino. That's one of the unusual things about this setup that I'd have pointed out if you had stood still."

"Plenty of time for everything." Her bare shoulder touched his as the boat rolled. "But tell me: Do lots of skilled workers come over?"

"About half of the entire crowd, I'd say. The transport authorities favor their applications, naturally. Since they spend every penny they make before they go home, you might say that their help costs the Temporans less than nothing."

"Very clever, these Temporans.... Ohhh! Look. How exquisite!"

The boat had rounded a wooded cape. Before them, a landlocked bay slept purple in the sun; from its crescent beach a city—all of marble, in a score of pastel shades—climbed rolling hills along broad avenues. Here were no aluminum curtain walls, jimcrack towers, and blank-eyed picture windows. Here were villas and pillared public buildings, reminiscent of the glory that was Greece.

"Carmine," said Arnie. "The dead city. That's the trouble with arbie's almost-perfect state, Priscilla. The Temporan counterpart of the United States actually does have a population of about five million now. That means there aren't enough people left to man

the waterworks, sewage systems, and other public utilities of a place as large as Carmine. They had to go back to the villages, or die of starvation, plague, or just plain sorrow."

"So they build that outrageous Portal Hotel!" Priscilla shook her dark curls savagely. "I don't get it, Arnie—any more than I understand why this boat runs."

"That's simple," he condescended. "It's all done with mirrors. This whole deck's a mirror, although it doesn't look like one; so is the cabin roof. They collect solar heat."

"Umm, What do they collect it in?"

"Why, a huge tank of Glauber's salts or something, I suppose."

"You suppose! Arnie, you've got to get over your habit of taking everything for granted—such as that the Temporans have slipped halfway back to barbarism. While you were making Muriel comfortable, I poked around a bit. There isn't a tank on board. There are no boilers; no batteries. Nothing except a teensy, empty box—about the size of your head—that's hooked directly to the propellor."

"Do we have to talk about such dull things?" Arnie protested.

"Did somebody call me?" Muriel appeared, pale and determinedly neglected.

"Oh yes, darling." Priscilla drew her to the rail. "You mustn't miss Carmine."

"Very quaint; reminds me of Capri, or Naples, or some place."

"Rio, maybe?" Arnie suggested sourly.

"That's it. Rio! When do we get there?"

"We don't," growled her husband; "the place is dead."

"Like Pompeii?" Muriel brightened. "I'll do some water colors of it."

"Yes, it really should be properly embalmed. Well, let's get our things together; the lodge is just around that next point, I think."

THE LODGE was a pleasant, airy, down-at-the-heels place on a bluff overlooking the purple sea. Their host—a dapper old man with a radiation-scar on his cheek—made them warmly welcome, offered no apologies for the plainness of their sunny rooms, and presented them to his twenty-odd guests.

As they had been warned, these were mainly Temporans. The smiling, sad-eyed creatures wore carefully-mended, sleeveless, hip-length tunics of pleasing pastel shades. They greeted the newcomers in sing-song English, then drifted away. The men, women, and a very few fragile children seemed interested only in soaking up sunshine during vacations that were evidently both well-earned and brief.

"*'There is sweet music here that softer falls than petals from blown roses on the grass,'*" Priscilla quoted softly. "Those people are heartbroken."

"They're merely undernourished," said Muriel. "Not enough vitamins, probably."

The lodgekeeper now brought forward his other terrestrial guests. They were Prof. Henry Whitcomb of Rose Poly—a tall, gnarled man with several missing fingers; his mousey wife, and a youngish chap with a toothful smile. He was introduced as Enrico Thomasetti of the Italian consular service. With the instinct of a male animal, Arnie disliked Thomasetti on sight.

"Isn't he handsome," Muriel whispered a moment later, as her eyes followed Enrico's flat back with favor. "I just know he dances divinely."

"He has bedrummy eyes," Arnie grunted.

"I wonder what he sees in Mrs. Whitcomb," Priscilla mused, as she watched their new acquaintance help the professor's wife down a flight of stairs leading to the beach. "Mother substitute, maybe?"

"And I wonder why he's over here," said Arnie. "Maybe Italy is getting worried because Tempora is cutting

into the tourist racket. I'd better message Old Sanderson about this." He clumped away, conscious that he had lost the limelight.

THE TERRESTRIALS became superficially better acquainted as they haunted the beach and tried to recapture their tan in the warm but watery September sunshine. Mrs. Whitcomb, it soon became obvious, had only one interest in life: her husband. The professor also had only one interest that could arouse his enthusiasm: a series of experiments on the effect of radioactive isotopes upon longevity.

"It's so important...for people to live longer, I mean," he told the others as he ran his maimed fingers through a shock of iron grey hair. "As it is now, we spend our lives in childish bickering and die just as we begin to mature. We should be spending billions to lengthen our lives rather than to cut them even shorter by developing that ridiculous C-bomb."

"Henry!" cried his wife.

"I'm sorry, Bertha; I'm sorry. Perhaps my time on Tempora won't be completely wasted, though. My physician, Dr. Wundermann St. Germain... You've heard of him, of course?"

They had to shake their heads.

"Pity. A great man; has some interesting theories on how to extend the life span. He's spending his vacation at the Portal Hotel, I hear. I'll go down and talk to him tomorrow."

"I also to ze Portal Hotel mus' go tomorrow," said Thomasetti in his thick Sicilian accent. "Let us make it a party."

"Count me out," said Arnie as he flipped a flat stone across the water. "I have to work." As Enrico smiled, he added sourly: "Don't condescend, 'Rico. You're working, too, if I'm not mistaken."

THE ITALIAN jumped, and paled to a delicate cream color. "What you mean?" he stammered.

"Your government sent you here to figure out a way to offset the appeal of T-L vacations. Right?"

"Ah yes. Yes!" The youngster laughed shakily. "I weel—'ow you Americans say, level weez you. Weez-out ze tourism my Italia, she eez wash' up. I mus' find 'ere ze answer to time lockers or my job, she eez wash' up too."

"Level with you?" Mrs. Whitcomb puzzled. "Is that an American colloquialism?"

"In some quarters it is," Priscilla assured her.

Enrico looked uncertainly at the girl. Then, as a cool breeze sprang to his rescue, he ran to fetch her a wrap and proceeded to shower her with other Latin attentions until Arnie stalked off in a dudgeon to work on his play.

Before the first week ended, it had become evident that Enrico was no match for Priscilla and her acrid wit. He knew when he was licked, and gradually transferred his tender looks and whispered confidences to Muriel.

Priscilla was not put out. She struck up a number of friendships with the observant Temporans; cultivated the shy professor on the few occasions when he could be found about the lodge, and consoled Arnie during frequent attacks of author's cramp.

If he had been alone, he would have chucked his play...a psychoanalytical comedy that became less comic with every completed page. But Muriel nagged him gently and with soul-destroying persistence. So he cursed and sweated over his typewriter, smoked too many cigarets, and wasted reams of paper. His sleep was peopled with nightmares, from which he awoke so exhausted that he refused to accompany the others on their jaunts.

One of these took them to Carmine for the inevitable picnic. Muriel returned all a-flutter, and with several studies that Arnie had to admit were the best she had ever done.

"Only," he added, "the subjects you

chose—that church or temple with the child's toy lying forgotten on its steps, for example—don't lend themselves very well to water colors. They're too big. Why...?" He moistened his lips, and made the suggestion that never failed to infuriate her: "Why don't you try oils or some other more powerful medium?"

"Thanks, Arnold," she astounded him by answering; "I think I will."

4

PRISCILLA rapped on Arnie's door, came in when he growled, and perched, little girl fashion, on his unmade bed. "Heard you prowling," she grinned. "Not going, huh?"

"No!" He rumbled his sandy hair savagely. "Want me to read you a page?"

"Heavens, I'm no drama critic. Besides, I've a hunch you'll never write anything worth while in this room."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't quite know yet... Let me see your hands."

"Why?" He stuck his paws behind him.

"'Cause maybe they look like mine."

"Ink off the ribbon," he said at last, displaying fingers of a dirty grey color. "I scrub and scrub, but I can't get all the dirt off."

"Humph. Mine are turning brown; some Temporan disease, do you think."

"I feel all right."

"Any nightmares?"

"What? Oh—yes, a few."

"And you've lost weight."

"Ten pounds." He sucked in his belly proudly. "Must be the surf bathing."

"Again, humph; Muriel's putting on weight."

"She can stand a few pounds."

Priscilla swung one foot for a while, then burst out: "Arnie, isn't it about time you socked Enrico on the snoot,"

"What on earth for?"

"Because I strongly suspect you're on the verge of becoming a..." She

placed forefingers to forehead in the guise of horns.

"Impossible!" He looked startled, nevertheless. "Muriel's the soul of suburban propriety. Besides, she's frigid; prides herself on it."

"Hah!"

"But she is, damn it; absolutely. I should know. She read an article once by some alleged Viennese doctor. It said all women are ethereal, and virtually...or was it virtuously...sexless. They condescend in order to have children or show appreciation for a fur coat or other gift. Since then..." He shrugged.

"Enrico considers himself God's gift to womankind."

"Even so," said Arnie glumly as he seated himself before the typewriter, "there are numerous things to consider. First, I don't believe Muriel has it in her. Second, to kick up her heels just once might do her a world of good. Third, she'll expect me to react like a childish brute, and I won't give her that satisfaction. Fourth, I'll have to lose another 50 pounds before I'm ready to trade fisticuffs with a young athlete. Fifth, even if I committed mayhem successfully I would come before the bar of justice with unclean hands. That's because, as soon as I lose those pounds, and finish this unmentionable paper, I intend to seduce *you*."

"Nicely put, Mr. Davis." She clapped her hands. "Morals certainly have changed since I was a wee girl in County Down."

"You're Irish?" He looked at her blankly.

"North of Ireland, machooshla!" she replied in an accent suddenly as thick as Enrico's. "Shure an' I'm an unreconstructed Orangewoman, nee Foyle."

"Come off it."

"You've head o' th' Little People, whisht?"

"The ones that go bump in the night," he agreed, trying to match her mood.

"Their blood flows in the veins of

every Irishman—Orange, Green, or Black."

"Please start talking sense."

"It is my considered opinion, Mr. Davis, that some Little People—familiarily known as Temporans—have had a Portal open into Ireland since the days when St. Patrick said bad cess to snakes."

"Run along, little girl, and let me get back to work."

"I'm dead serious, Arnie; the Temporans have been spying on us for centuries. Now, when they've got themselves in a bad way, they're using us, somehow, to help them out of it."

"You're crazy." He stuck a new page into the typewriter.

"And what Irishman isn't? So now tell me about your nightmares."

"Huh?"

"Don't grunt; talk!"

"**THEY'RE** peculiar, Pris." He scratched his head. "I always dream I'm back setting type for a small town newspaper. (I paid my way through college by working as a linotypist, back before the automatics took over.) The copy I'm setting is in a foreign language, so I have to watch every letter. There's a mountain of this copy on the spike, a deadline to meet, and the ancient linotype keeps breaking. Nevertheless, it's sort of fun, doing useful work for a change. . . I wake up with my hands black, the way they used to get when I handled the slugs."

"I work on a truck garden. . . acres and acres of it," said Priscilla. The job suits me to a T, except that the tractors are on their last wheels and there's glass missing from the greenhouses. I do a lot of weeding by hand. When I wake up, my fingers are greenish brown, as though from chlorophyl."

"What does Muriel dream?" Arnie asked, bemused.

"She thinks she's retouching a mural. Told me about it yesterday, after she found a dab of paint on her hand. It looked like tempera—the stuff artists

use on walls. But she says she has never worked in that medium."

"And Enrico?"

"He says he never dreams, but he acts sort of shifty about it; and he has developed a big welt on his right shoulder."

"What nightmare does the professor ride?"

"He's not talking; laughs the whole thing off. But his wife is terrified."

Arnie put the cover on his typewriter and got up stiffly. "I think it's high time to take you girls out of this dump," he said.

"Didn't you know? I read the fine print on our transports. We can't go home until our three weeks are up; we're marooned."

"Oh." He sat down again, stuffed his manuscript into an envelope, and tossed it into the wastebasket. "Things have a habit of disappearing around here," he muttered in sheepish explanation. "Well, let's go out and look around a bit."

"We'll have to ride bicycles if we do any exploring," Priscilla suggested as they trotted to the door. "Except for the sun boat, no vehicles are for hire."

"I still think our nightmares are just that," said Arnie as he balanced precariously along a pretty, rutted road leading westward from the lodge. "They're some kind of wish fulfillment to compensate for our worthless lives. But, for argument's sake, let's say the Temporans are using us for devious ends. Then, in the first place, why do we have dreams? They're dead giveaways."

"Maybe the dream-suppressor up here is out of repair, like the hot water system," the girl replied. "When Enrico took us to that dance. . . the one you wouldn't get dressed for. . . I checked with people I met at the hotel. *They* sleep like lambs."

"That brings up my second point: Do you work on that farm at night?"

"Why no!" She swerved her bike to

avoid a pensive rabbit. "I go wherever I go in a sunmobile van thing. I seem to work for several days, and to spend my nights at a nearby inn. Then, on the last morning, I wake to find the sun rising outside my window at the lodge. But the calendar says only one night has passed."

"The same with me. . . . Say, maybe we're repaying that interest they charge, in kind!" He thought this over for half a mile or so. "No. I work an eight hour shift at the paper; my interest should have been used up long ago."

"Suppose," she said as they topped a rise overlooking the equivalent of the Hudson River, and Arnie stopped to pant while she studied the almost deserted countryside, "suppose that time here goes many times faster than they admit. Say it goes a hundred times faster than it does on Earth—except when a drowning man is supposed to be reviewing his past life, or something. And say they're really charging us 90% interest instead of ten; who's to know?"

"Ukk!" He collapsed under a blasted tree to recuperate from that thought.

"The way I've heard it," she sat down close beside him, "the Little People always have made fools of big strong Rips Van Winkle."

He slipped an arm around her slim shoulder; despite the problem confronting them, he felt contented and relaxed for the first time in years.

THEY ATE lunch beside the "Hudson", crossed it on a primitive ferry run by an old man with one leg and half an arm, and pedalled westward until they reached a village located somewhere in the neighborhood of terrestrial Suffern.

The mayor appeared, and made them haltingly welcome; he spoke vaguely of bandits, and urged them to return to the lodge. But, when they insisted, he brought a wrinkled map and pointed out a route to the next inhabited place.

On the road again, they found that Arnie's watch was missing, and that

someone had filled their handlebar baskets with bread, cheese, and gourds of milk.

"Oh well," Arnie said philosophically, "time means nothing here, anyway."

They spent the night in the haymow of an abandoned farm, where Arnie proved that his weight did not handicap him unduly. They went to sleep, finally, in the conviction that there could be no more nightmares.

"I must have planted an acre of string beans," Priscilla yawned next morning as they were dowsing each other with icy water from the barnyard well. "Ow! Not on my hair, stupid! How will I ever get it combed now?"

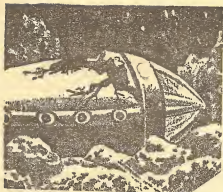
"Then I went to the inn with my farm manager. Had a glass or two of beer, and told him how he could boost crop yields by shifting from plowing to stubble mulching."

"Was that *you* smooching with the hayseed?" Arnie whooped. "I thought I was double-dreaming; I was in that same inn with my foreman. He's moving up to some big job at the capital. Thinks that, since I'm coming along so well with the language, maybe I can take over for him one of these days."

"So you not only work in my village but you know Temporan!" Priscilla made a feint at throwing the water bucket—as well as its contents—at him. "You pick up things almost as fast as the natives do. . . . Now get your clothes on. You don't resemble a behemoth so much, any more; but you've a long way to go before you'll pass for Adonis."

That noon they ate the last of their provisions on the marble river embankment of a smaller version of Carmine.

"This place is enchanted, not dead," Arnie marvelled, after he had finished the last sliver of cheese. "I've seen ghost towns in Colorado. They're always a shambles, but this could almost be reoccupied tomorrow. See? That roof was patched not too long ago; and somebody's been working on this temple window. I'll bet we find Sleeping



Beauty at the palace, all ready to be awakened."

"Well, you won't be the laddy who awakens her," Priscilla laughed as she kissed him. "You have your hands full of woman now."

They came upon a vast, bombed-out industrial area somewhere in the neighborhood of Patterson; fused quartz blocked the road and signs screamed radiation.

They detoured southward and soon found the land showing signs of life. Farms looked fairly prosperous—although they often saw men and women dragging plows, while their children clung desperately to the plow handles. The only power equipment in evidence consisted of a few sunmobiles that passed them, loaded to bursting with produce.

At sundown they came upon a large village in the approximate vicinity of earthly Morristown. They dined at the inn, slept without nightmares for once, and set out again at sunrise.

"Let's follow that trail and see whether we can locate the Temporan equivalent of Dover," Priscilla suggested.

Three hours later they topped one more of the endless hills and stopped to stare.

"Home at last," cried Priscilla, "but you'd hardly know the old place. See how the sun glints over there. Those are my greenhouses!"

"And that's my newspaper, just to the right of the park," said Arnie.

"What now?"

"Why, we go down and get to work. Come on; I'll race you."

They went off in a cloud of dust, a pixie pursued by a man who was becoming less bearlike with every passing day.

5

MR. XOTL found them sipping in-and-outers in the firelit common room of the Duvorum Inn, on the night their transports expired.

"So we've got to head back for the reservation," Arnie said bitterly, as he touched his glass to Priscilla's.

"Why?" asked the Temporan.

"Vacation's over; Suburbia calling. That sort of thing."

"You don't need a transport."

"Huh?"

"The man says you don't need a transport, stupid." Priscilla kissed Mr. Xotl on his sallow cheek and ordered a drink for him.

"I'll level with you," said their caller. "I'll put all my cards on the table. My government..."

"You," said Priscilla, wagging a slightly tipsy finger, "have been consorting with gangsters."

"Just one," said Mr. Xotl.

"Enrico?"

"How did you know?"

"Because, every once in a while 'Rico would become excited, forget that he was supposed to be a consular officer, and start levelling. What's he doing?"

"Pulling a plow," said Mr. Xotl. "That's the second best thing he's good for. Since he came on forged receipts, he'll be here some time; he gripes, but has a compensation."

"Muriel?" Arnie guessed.

"Decidedly. She needed a healthy young animal who didn't believe in Viennese vaporings. That, plus a change in reading matter and a chance to do some work."

"Touche," said Arnie. "Her maga-

zines said I was doing the right thing by her. I got to believing it by osmosis. . . . What's her work?"

"Restoring the Carmine murals. We practically have to drive her out of the place at night. She's staying here, has sent for the children."

"Oh yes. The children," said Arnie.

"How long will it take her to finish a job like that?" Priscilla asked.

"The rest of her life, probably. By that time, we may be sufficiently recovered from our atomic debauch to move back to town."

"That debauch," said Arnie. "How did it happen?"

"It happened," sighed Mr. Xotl, "because Tempora is a planet full of thieves, as you may have discovered. As soon as we learned how to build portals into your world, it became inevitable that our entire economic system would be based even more firmly on thievery than is yours."

"For more than a thousand years, now, we've been swiping things from Earth and thriving mightily thereby. Strange that you never really caught on to our depredations; your folklore mentions them constantly—and not only in Ireland!

"Finally, however, we made the mistake of stealing your H-bomb." He spread long fingers in a gesture of annihilation. "It went off in our hands."

"So now you're stealing our manpower and know-how to help you patch things up," Arnie snapped. "Instead of invading Earth, you're *exvading* it!"

"Something like that. But we're helping you, too as we always do. To your dullards we give surcease from boredom—as well as a chance to do some honest work. Thereby, they partially escape, at least, from the inferiority complex that automation inevitably brings."

"Humph." Arnie was staring into his martini glass, as though it were an ink pool. "And what about our non-dullards, if I may coin a clumsy phrase?"

"Oh, when some terrestrial starts pry-

ing around our portal, or when we greatly need someone with a particular skill or talent, we send one of our operatives after him. We then give him the nightmare treatment and, if he is able to adapt to our wacky standards, we adopt him.

"Take the case of Prof. Whitcomb: His missing fingers should have told you that he is engaged in something more dangerous than isotopic research. Fact is, he's the big wheel in the C-bomb project. Your government made the mistake of taking him off that job and sending him here to, ah—shall I say 'discover' the secret of the portal. (Portals would make marvelous super-weapons.)

"But Prof. Whitcomb's physician is one of ours, naturally. Dr. St. Germain advised us that his patient's heart wasn't in the bomb project; he really was interested only in his longevity experiments. So . . . we have induced him to come over."

"And the gangster axis rigged the time-lockers so they could send Enrico to steal the portal secret from Whitcomb," Priscilla gurgled. "How delightful."

"Exactly. So poor 'Rico pulls plows. A pity; think of the fun—the heedless, needless melodrama—we could have had in the old days. Gangsters close in on the portal. Bullets fly. Bombs boom. Temporans at bay. In comes Mr. Davis, riding a white horse—a very large white horse—and saves the day. Perhaps we could have spared one of our few remaining dragons for him to ride."

Mr. Xotl sighed, and looked wistfully at the flames dancing in the inn fireplace. "But those days are gone," he continued. "Tempora has no time for heroics; she is too busy pulling at her bootstraps. So we use our wits. Yes, thank you, Mrs. Davis, I will have another martini. One of the most charming terrestrial vices."

"Mrs. Davis!" Arnie had the grace to blush.

"Yes; you married in that haymow, according to our simple, thievish law. I did not entirely approve at the time, but Priscilla had her heart set on you ...and we do everything we can to make our operatives happy."

"A double martini," Arnie said to a passing waiter. "No; make it a treble!"

"Heavens!" cried the girl. "I just remembered. What about What's-His-Name...Dr. Northrup? He'll come thundering at the portal in search of me."

"Unless he unlearns many things, the good doctor will have to '*absent himself from felicity awhile*,'" Mr. Xotl chuckled.

Priscilla recited,

*"'Twould ring the bells of Heaven
in the wildest peal for years,
If Parson lost his senses, and people
came to theirs,
And he and they together knelt
down in angry prayers
For tamed and shabby tigers, and*

dancing dogs and bears.'"

"Exactly. So it will be announced that you people met with a tragic accident, because you insisted on exploring our wild hinterland. I can't have the keepers distracting our escaped bear from the writing of his play about Tempora."

"How...?" Arnie began.

"You showed its excellent outline to your foreman; he showed it to me.

"And now, my children, I must leave you for a while. Time, the dark whale, keeps thrashing about and demanding attention. Whenever you wish to see your children, Mr. Davis, let me know. I will send our remaining plane around immediately, if someone hasn't bent it again. Mrs. Thomasetti hopes both of you will visit Carmine soon. Good day."

Mr. Xotl finished his drink with relish, rose, smoothed his patched tunic, bowed, and marched out into the night.



Frederik Pohl's

Engrossing New Story

WAPSHOT'S DEMON

James Blish's

Newest Thought-Provoker

ART-WORK

Ed Emsh has painted a beautiful cover, illustrating Randall Garrett's story, "The Saboteur", which is based upon an idea never before presented in science fiction, to our knowledge!



These, and many others, appear in the July

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

144 Pages — Now on sale at all stands

Editorial



IN REFERENCE to the parodies we have been presenting in this magazine, as well as in *Science Fiction Stories*, and *Future Science Fiction*, a reader says, in part: "The book reviews in verse are a lot of fun and I hope there'll be more. But what about a bit of serious poetry now and then? Certainly there has been respectable poetry that would fit into the weird or fantastic field—just consider 'The Ancient Mariner', to give a classic example—but why hasn't there been any real *science fiction* poetry? I don't mean Odes to Mars, or Requiems For Planets, or that sort of thing—I've seen them—but something solid enough to be a candidate for an anthology of general poetry."

Well, first of all we have to consider the differences between "poetry" and "verse". And since we're dealing with art and art-forms, rather than science, we're dealing with opinions, mingled with facts—rather than just facts themselves, about which there cannot be any meaningful dispute. You *can*, for example, argue the question as to whether what we call gravity really exists; you might even be able to prove, through a *tour de force* of logic, that gravity does not exist—winning the argument, however, wouldn't stop you from falling, if you stepped out of a ten story window, with only air between you and the ground. On the other hand, convincing people that your definition of "science fiction" was the correct one could be very meaningful.

What we call "verse" usually contains

Science Fiction Poetry?

meter, rhyme, and often separate stanzas, following more or less definite patterns, as in Randall Garrett's parody reviews. Since these elements are *among* the frequently-employed elements in poetry, the question of why a given verse isn't accepted as "poetry" often comes up. You have to consider the matter of *intent*, in the first place.

Garrett, for example, had no intention of writing poetry in his "book reviews in verse"; it isn't serious, *on the whole*, even though there may be a sharp critical insight here and there. Matter set forth in rhyme and rhythm, with no aim other than affording amusement, can clearly be placed in the "verse" category.

Then there is the question of *what* is said, and if what is said can be said as well in prose. Actually, the points that Garrett makes in his verses could be made as well in prose, since the comic effects of his internal rhymes, etc., would be just as funny if he were doing the same thing with any other subject than the one at hand.

But in *poetry*, the same thing could not be said as in prose—at least within anything like similar lengths, and perhaps not even at greatly expanded length.

Poetry, among other things, is the statement of various *emotions* in greatly condensed form, often so arranged that important words and phrases will have several layers of meaning at the same time. It depends heavily upon allusions, which, in the specific context of the poem, can suggest more than pages of prose; it carries

[turn to page 72]

Vera Tobias was a clever woman
... just clever enough to outsmart
herself!

WYVERNHOLD

NOVELET.

by

L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

(author of "The Mythological Background")

illustrated by Orban

VERA TOBIAS knew that the gatekeeper of Wyvernhold was a giant but was still surprised when he proved tall enough to look over an elephant.

This giant could not be a real person—a zoon as the scientists put it. He was a zooid. The process of making zooids had earned Sigmund Palma the fortune needed for Wyvernhold.

The giant bent to peer. With a trembling hand, Vera thrust the invitation-card out of the window. The giant took it and began reading it with a flashlight the size of a hydrant. Palma had warned Vera to bring the card to show, just as he had warned her not to tell anybody she was coming. The reason for the latter demand was his desire to keep people off his estate. If the news got out that he was entertaining, he said, reporters and other vermin would try to sneak in. And, while the grounds were well posted about the dangers of trespassing, he did not want the complications that ensued when even the most flagrant trespasser was killed.

He added something about parking her 'plane on the meadow across the highway from the main gate, but she laughed and asked him what sort of 'plane he thought a poor widow and librarian could keep?

Probably, he thought her husbands



had been rich. Others thought that. But Robert, the first, had no backlog behind his big earning power and had killed himself leaving not even an insurance-policy. Adrian was a four-flusher, a faker who spoke vaguely of non-existent investments, trusts, homes, and other property. Nothing you could pin down, but enough to fool everybody but the Department of Internal

Revenue. (In her rare candid moments, Vera admitted she had used the same tactics on Adrian, so it was hard to say who got fooled the worse.) He made a modest living as a salesman until he dropped dead of heart-failure.

So here was little Vera, only in her middle thirties and still not at all bad-looking, a real sod-widow twice over, driving up in a battered little old automobile for dinner with one of the world's richest men.

The giant tucked the card into the leather scrip that hung from the belt of his medieval-looking costume. "Drive in, madam, and stop a few feet inside the gate," he said.

Vera did. She heard the gate close and big bolts shoot home. Ahead rose a dark mass of forest. She thought she could see a tower over the trees in the fading light.

The giant reappeared. "Follow me, madam," he said. His voice was no deeper than that of an ordinary man, though one would have expected a bass boom. On the other hand it had the flat, mechanical quality of all zooidal speech.

The giant strode off up a winding graveled road. Vera followed.

She tried to repress, as foolish, phantasies in which she snared and married Sigmund Palma. A man in his position could have a harem chosen from the planet's beauties. Of course if by some fluke she *did* land him, she could manage him. She could manage any man; she had proved it. Her bridge-friend Bea had been a lying, slandering cat to say behind Vera's back, that Robert's suicide and Adrian's early death had resulted from too much management.

Still, Vera couldn't help regretting that awful quarrel, seventeen years ago to the day, when she had thrown Sigmund Palma over for Robert Gingrich. Bob had seemed to have much better prospects. Sigmund had called her a mercenary little vampire, incapable of love, and she had called him an empty,

neurotic poseur, incapable of truth.

Well, poseur he might be; but one could put up with a lot of affectation from a billionaire interstellar explorer and industrial tycoon...

THE GIANT shouted. Vera looked out the side of her car and almost drove off the road.

Beside the road stood a unicorn. It stamped and lowered its horn as if to charge, but the giant's shout seemed to check it. One might have thought it a big Belgian cart-horse with a four-foot twisted horn glued to its forehead; but a close look, even in this poor light, showed that this was no horse. The details were different. It had three hooves on each foot and a long tufted tail like a lion's.

Vera fought down her fear. If the knowledge that Sigmund Palma had brought back from Fleury's planet enabled him to make zooids in the form of people and real animals, he could make them in the form of fabulous monsters, too. Come to think, a literate zooid probably violated some law. Wasn't there a rule that no zooid should be made that intelligent? The question had come up among librarians, who were asked what they'd do if a zooid came in and asked for a book. No doubt the creator of zooids could get permits for experimental types.

The trees closed in: big old pines and cedars. Sigmund Palma must have covered the estate with the darkest evergreens he could find. The effect was somber.

The road dipped and crossed a wooden bridge. Hemlocks replaced the other evergreens. The stream gurgled blackly under the car.

With a loud splashing, a huge reptilian head rose from the water and arched towards the car on a long neck. The head had long, writhing, whiskery filaments. The jaws gaped to show foot-long teeth. The giant shouted again and the head withdrew.

Vera pulled her shaken nerves together. Well, she thought, if by some chance she did land Sigmund Palma, she would insist on getting rid of that thing. If he wanted fabulous monsters, he might have something pretty like the unicorn, but no dragons, dinosaurs, or other reptiles, real or synthetic. She would be firm.

The giant had been striding for several minutes. They must have come miles. The road forked again and again. The giant always chose one way without hesitation, but Vera could never have remembered all the turnings.

The black shadow of the forest lifted and there was the castle. It looked medieval, but not quite authentically so. There was a histrionic boldness, a self-assertiveness, about its lines that would not be found in a real castle. (Vera's eidetic memory turned the pages of Angelucci's "The Castles of Europe," a big picture-book in the Reference Department.) Wyvernhold looked like a stage-set wrought by a non-literal stage-designer for "Macbeth" or "Lohengrin". A pair of orange flames blazed on each side of the entrance, across the drawbridge. Their reflections in the water of the moat made a rectangle of four orange splotches. The giant raised a hand.

"Park here, madam," he said.

VERA DREW up to the side of the moat and got out. The giant started to lead her across the drawbridge when there was a rustling overhead. Vera looked up and shrieked. Something batlike but condor-sized was swooping down upon her. She made out a hooked beak, pointed ears, and a long snaky tail. The giant shouted again and the thing sheered off. Vera recognized a wyvern from Schwarzbach's "Heraldry". The wyvern flew in slow flapping circles to regain altitude and came to rest on the battlements. There it sat silhouetted like a gargoye.

Vera would have given up and driven away but for the thought of those billions. The wyvern, too, would have to go. If Sigmund wanted a wyvern to symbolize his castle, he could have this one stuffed and mounted on a turret.

She asked: "What was that word you shouted? Isn't it the one you used on the other things?"

"Follow me, madam," said the giant, starting across the drawbridge.

The flames flanking the portcullis came from a pair of bronzen torches that leaned out from the wall. They were, she decided, gas-flames. The main door, behind the portcullis, was closed. The giant banged the knocker. The door opened.

"Mrs. Adrian Tobias," said the giant.

"Come in, Mrs. Tobias," said a flat, toneless voice.

The speaker was a kind of djinn seven feet tall, clad in a turban, baggy silken pants, and slippers with turned-up toes. The skin of his face and bare torso was dark; his nose was hooked; his chin was adorned by a black forked beard.

"Let me take your coat," said the djinn, bowing.

Well, at least he would not squash the life out of her by accidentally stepping on her, as the giant might have done. She gave her coat to the djinn, who hung it in a closet and said: "This way, please."

He led her down a huge hall that seemed to run parallel to the outer wall of the castle for an indefinite distance. At least it was lighted electrically, and not by torches or some other affectedly antique means. For even a small part of the wealth represented here, Vera would have yielded to any proposal that Palma might make—except that, being a practical woman, she knew the only way of securing a slice would be by having a firm legal hold on the owner.

The djinn stopped at an open door

and announced: "Mrs. Adrian Tobias-as!"

He bowed Vera into the room. It was a big library, ornately furnished. There were what looked like rare books on glass-covered lecterns with fluorescent lights over them. There was a pair of globes, a terrestrial and a celestial globe, each about a yard in diameter. The celestial globe had the stars marked by jewels.

Vera got only a brief blurred impression of all this at first, because she was too busy looking at her host and his companion. She still recognized Sigmund Palma. The years had lined his sharp, aquiline features and put a touch of distinguished gray on his temples, but otherwise had changed him little. But his costume. . .

It was something between a Greek *hoplite* and a Napoleonic *cuirassier*. It included several pieces of armor, either of silver or silver-plated. Under his left arm Palma carried a helmet of sphero-conical shape with a nasal and a chain-mail camail. He wore a shining cuirass, a tartan kilt, a pair of high laced boots of the type used for camping about the year 1900, and over these a pair of gleaming greaves. A sword hung in a jeweled scabbard from a baldric over the cuirass. Metal wristguards encircled his forearms. He was a spectacle.

The other person was a tall slant-eyed woman with orange hair, clad in a long clinging half-transparent sea-green gown. She lounged in a languid attitude on a sofa.

PALMA STRODE forward, gleaming and glittering like a Christmas-tree. He clicked the heels of the 1900 boots and bowed. Then he came on again with his hand outstretched. "Well, Vera!" he said. "How nice to see you

"How nice to see you too!"

"You don't look a day older."

"You look younger if anything."

"Oh, let me present Gnoth. Gnoth,

this is my old friend Vera Munch—only I should say Vera Tobias."

The slant-eyed woman nodded. "Delighted."

"So am I," said Vera.

"Will you have a wassan?" said Palma.

"What's that?" said Vera.

"A cocktail made by the Retf of Fleury's planet. Fairly harmless and not like anything you've ever tasted."

"All right."

Palma clapped. The djinn appeared. Palma said: "Three wassans." He turned back to Vera. "I brought Gnoth from Fleury's planet too, you know."

"How interesting," said Vera without warmth. Her recollection of Clarke Li's "The Inhabited Universe" was that the Fleurians were civilized but far from human. No extraterrestrials were *that* human. "How about that butler? Is he from Fleury's planet too?"

"No, Selim was made in my own factory—ah, here we are."

Selim was there with three glasses on a tray. The liquid was deep purple with little flashing lights. Sigmund Palma set down his helmet and each took a glass.

"*Zla seiru*," said Palma.

The cocktail was different, though Vera would have found it hard to say just how. It tasted like an arctic sunset.

"We've both come a long way," said Palma.

"So we have," said Vera. "You've done marvelously."

Palma shrugged, as well as one can in a cuirass. "Fate took a hand. As Mrs. Kelly tells me, the Powers decided it was time my spirit were given another run, to see if its character had developed in proportion to its other qualities."

"Who's Mrs. Kelly?" said Vera. She noticed that the beautiful Gnoth had not drunk. Instead she sat holding her cocktail with the unnatural immobility

that zooids assume when not carrying out their masters' orders. Vera, though she had never had a zooidal servant, knew that zooids did not consume human food and drink. They drank a liquid that one bought from Sigmund Palma, Incorporated: a mixture of hydrocarbons, carbohydrates, soluble proteoids, and other components; more like a motor-fuel than the food of a zoon.

Perhaps Fleurians acted like that, too. Still, Vera felt that things were not what they seemed, even though what they seemed was bizarre enough.

"My medium," said Palma.

"You mean a Spiritualist medium?"

"She is of higher grade in the occult sciences than a mere Spiritualist."

"What did she tell you?"

"She revealed to me that I was a reincarnation of many great conquerors and adventurers."

"Is that why you dress like that?"

"Yes, to honor them, since after all they're just earlier and less perfect versions of me. The cuirass is one Alexander of Macedon might have worn. The helmet is for Harald Hardrada. The kilt is for Rob Roy Macgregor."

"How extraordinary!"

PALMA MADE a deprecatory movement with his open hand. "Some might think it a bit odd, but I'm only doing what many men would like to do if they could and if they dared. The sword, now, is like that used by Rasalu of Atlantis."

"Atlantis? Now how could you find out about that? I thought scientists had decided it never existed?"

"Mrs. Kelly told me all about it, even down to the design of the sword. And I have a fur hat I wear when I feel like Attila, but only in cold weather."

With a slight shudder, Vera began to recast her plans. If she should land Sigmund, she would have to have him committed to an asylum. She would

not need to be greedy. With all his billions, she could afford to make him an allowance big enough to support him in comfort. She said: "What about those things on the grounds, Siggy? Those dragons and things. Are they all zooids, or are some of them from Fleury's planet too?"

"They're all zooids. Did you have any trouble with them?"

"N-not exactly. A couple made passes at me, but the giant shouted at them and they went away. He shouted some foreign word I never did catch."

Palma grinned. "That was the password for tonight. Nobody can move about my grounds without it."

"The advantage of zooids is that you can build them with just enough intelligence to understand the idea of a password, but not enough to demand rights or pay. That's why the unions don't like them."

In the doorway, Selim said: "Dinner is served."

The big dining room had half-timbered walls and a low beamed ceiling. The walls were hung with crossed weapons of all kinds and ages. The food was excellent though not unconventional. Gnoth did not eat.

"Tell me about yourself, Siggy," said Vera between bites of pheasant-breast. This was the oldest gambit in the game between men and women, and it still usually worked. "What's this great mystery the papers keep hinting at?"

"They hint because they don't know. A man in my position has to protect his privacy, you know."

"Well?"

"Oh, I don't mind telling you. You won't repeat it, will you?"

"Of course not." Vera calculated how, if Palma showed no signs of being hooked, she could get a ghost-writer to put the material into salable form.

"Well, the only mystery is how I got the proteoid formulas from Fleury's

planet. You know the Fleurians have a scientific religion—or, I should say, they make a religion of science. The god Ytluc symbolizes the law of gravity; the goddess Thra, the theory of evolution, and so on. Now, when I settled in Cigrath, I got to know Gnoth, the daughter of Senemos the high priest.

"From her I learned the Fleurians were ahead of us in one science: biochemistry. They had worked out the formulas for making proteoids. Our chemists have long known these were theoretically possible, but each proteoid is a particular combination of guanidino-sulfonic acid molecules, arranged in a particular way, just as with proteins. The chance of hitting the right one of the possible ways is—well, suppose there were one grain of sand different from all the other grains of sand in the world, and you knew this one grain was lying somewhere on some beach on earth. Your chance of finding this grain at the first try, by going to some beach at random and picking up one grain, would be much better than your chance of making a proteoid without these formulas."

SELIM SERVED the dessert. Palma continued: "Gnoth told me the formulas were in the archives of the Temple of Xir. By this time she loved me passionately—didn't you, Gnoth?"

"Yes," said Gnoth tonelessly.

"So she arranged to disguise me as a priest of Xir..." Palma rattled on between bites of meringue glace. It was a pretty thrilling story, full of good blood-and-thunder melodrama. The only trouble was that Vera already knew it.

It was, in fact, freely adapted from (1930), by Otis Howard Rice. Vera, who read with incredible speed and remembered everything, had come across this work while helping a reader who was writing a thesis on the history of imaginative fiction.

They smoked and drank several ponies of liqueur while Palma rambled on about his Fleurian adventures. He concluded:

"...so we slammed the door of the spaceship in the face of these furious priests. The skipper warned them he was going to take off, but they hung round the base of the ship, pounding on the supports, till the jet roared out and fried the whole lot to cinders. So here we are."

"How exciting! And you still have those original data-sheets?" said Vera.

"Yes. I haven't dared copy them lest the code-numbers leak out. I can't get proper patent protection because the patent-law's been in a mess ever since interstellar travel started. So I have to exploit the formulas secretly, which is a precarious business. No doubt earthly biochemists will some day catch up to the Fleurians and my formulas will be worthless, so meanwhile I make all the hay I can. I don't think Alexander or Napoleon would be ashamed of me. True, I haven't conquered the world by force of arms, but I do have influence on the World Organization."

This, thought Vera, was probably true. The newspapers also hinted that Sigmund Palma had several of this parliament's representatives in his pocket. But for heaven's sake, what, in this monstrous mass of lies, boasts, and affectations, was true? Certainly Palma's wealth was. If he wasn't really a reincarnation of Winston Churchill, he did sway the destiny of millions as a tycoon and political wire-puller on the world stage. If Gnoth was not a real Fleurian, Palma had certainly been to Fleury's planet and had brought back something.

"Would you like to see the formulas?" said Palma.

"You'd show them to me?"

"Why not? You won't betray me."

"Oh, Siggie, how sweet of you!"

"Come along, then. Selim, show us to the dungeon."

SELIM LED the three down stone stairs where dank moss grew on slimy walls. At least so it looked until Vera's finger-tips, brushing the wall, discovered that the moss was artificial. Even the water seeping down the wall was made of water-glass and was quite dry. This was certainly carrying a pose pretty far. Vera resolved that *nothing* Sigmund Palma might do should startle her.

The dungeon was fitted up with instruments of torture and death, such as a realistic-looking beheading-block with an ax to match. Vera shuddered. The quicker this maniac was confined, the better. It might all be just play-acting, but there was probably a sadistic streak here that might break out into deeds of horror. And he surely wouldn't show her these precious papers unless he meant to see more of her—perhaps even to marry her. She would really be doing good...

Sigmund Palma went to the wall. A section of the stone swung back. It was just plaster-board on a hinge, painted to look like stone. Behind it was a modern-looking safe-door.

Palma spun the dial and spoke some low words at the door. The door opened. Palma took out a thick roll of paper, yellow in the gaslight. "Here they are," he said, unrolling them.

Vera strained her eyes to read the sheets in hope of gleaming enough mental pictures with her eidetic memory so that, no matter what the outcome, she would have something to exploit. But the writing seemed to be in a strange signary. Fleurian, no doubt. There was a short paragraph at the top of each page, and below it long columns of what looked like numbers, or combinations of letters and numbers. How could she ever remember all those odd little shapes...

"How does it work?" she asked.

"Those are code-numbers, in a Fleurian language of course. By set-

ting the controls of the synthesizers I control the order in which the guanidino-sulfonic acids are arranged in the proteoid molecule. With modern automation I run the factory practically single-handed as far as the materials are concerned; most of my workers are just maintenance-men. Each day I set the controls for the day's run and scramble them at the end of the day. My biochemists assemble the zooids from these materials. I know now how God felt when Adam worked."

"Do you synthesize the whole zooid, or just an egg?"

"Neither; I synthesize an individual at what would be the stage of hatching or birth. Proteoid-molecules are simpler than protein-molecules and don't include mechanisms of heredity and differentiation. So I have to make most of the proteoids that go into the complete zooid, or at least organs to make these proteoids."

"But aren't there thousands of different kinds?"

"There are thousands of different proteins in a zoon, but a zooid is a much simpler biochemical structure, though it works well enough for our purposes. But it can't breed, or heal an injury by itself, or be anywhere near as adaptable as a fairly simple zoon."

"Why can't you make real people? Out of real protein, that is?"

"Because there are so many complications that a factory, to make them, would have to be as big as a continent. Have you seen all you want?"

"Yes. Oh, Siggy, it's so nice of you to trust me like this..."

"Yes, isn't it? Take her."

GNOTH SEIZED one of Vera's arms and twisted it behind her. Selim did the same with the other.

"Siggy!" screamed Vera. "What are you doing?"

Palma grinned. "What do you think?"

"Tell them to stop!"

"No."

"Let me go!"

"After showing you those? Ha!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll do you a favor."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, anybody who calls me an empty, neurotic poseur deserves torture."

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean it!"

"But, because we've been friends, I'll give you a quick death. Strip her."

Vera screamed and struggled and wept but could do little against the strength of the zooids. They tore and cut off her clothes.

"You've kept your figure well," said Palma. "If I were just a man, I might be tempted to use that body. All right, her head."

Selim and Gnoth tied Vera's wrists and ankles. They dragged her to the block and forced her to kneel. From the far side of the block, Gnoth dug steely fingers into Vera's black curls and pulled her head forward so that her neck pressed into the narrow, hollowed-out place on top of the block.

Out of the corner of her eye, Vera saw Selim pick up the ax. He swung it.

Vera stopped screaming and shut her eyes. Instead of a sharp shock and oblivion, there was a loud clang and a yell from Palma. "Gnoth! Help me!" he cried.

Gnoth let go of Vera's hair. Vera fell in a heap and struggled up to see Selim and Palma fighting, the former with the ax and the latter with the Atlantean sword. As an ax is not much good for parrying, they leaped back and forth and swung and jabbed without much actual contact. The front of Palma's cuirass was creased by a glancing ax-blow.

Gnoth picked up an iron dojigger, something like a poker with an intricate end, from the rack of torture-

instruments. She ran around Selim and hit him over the head from behind. The djinn whirled and struck. Gnoth's head flew off. Blue haemoid fluid spouted.

Palma lunged and drove the sword into Selim's body. As Selim turned back, Palma withdrew the blade and thrust again. Then the ax crashed down on his head, splitting it to the chin.

Palma fell, clanging, his brains spilling out on the floor. Selim took a couple of steps with the hilt of the sword protruding from his chest and the point from his back. Then he too sank down.

Vera fainted.

WHEN SHE came to, the djinn was sitting with his back against a pillar. The sword was still through his body. His ax lay in front of him. He said: "If you wish to cut your bonds, you can crawl over here and rub them against the ax-blade."

It was awkward. As Vera struggled she said: "What happened, Selim? Why did you save me?"

He spoke slowly. "I am not an earthly zooid, but a Fleurian as you people call us. My proper name is Zdion. I came to earth, destroyed Palma's zooid butler, and took its shape. My task was to recover or destroy the formulae Palma had stolen, and this was the first time he opened the safe in my presence. Hitherto he has always locked everyone out of the dungeon."

"You mean you can change your shape?"

"Yes. We are what you call polymorphs."

"Why should anybody want to change?"

"In our system, the young are workers and adopt a squat muscular shape; the middle-aged are rulers and take a long-limbed large-brained shape suitable for overseers; the old are consumers or esthetes and adopt a shape with large digestive systems and sensory organs to assure the greatest enjoyment."

"But how do you do it? With bones and everything?"

"How do you change your expression?"

"Why I—I just do, that's all. My brain tells my muscles what to do."

"It is as simple as that with us, though we cannot change quickly. It takes several days of effort for one complete change."

"What do you look like in your natural shape? If you have one, that is."

"Something like your alligators. I can imitate an Earthman, but I could not grow extra limbs and look like, say, a spider."

"Thank goodness for that. Did Sigmund steal the papers from the Temple of Xir like he said?"

"He did steal them, but not as he told you. He did it by murdering Senemos, who had befriended him. Senemos was no priest but a professor; life on our planet is quite different from that which Mr. Palma described to you."

"I thought so. Tell me more."

"It is too long and intricate a story to tell you now, especially as I am dying."

"Dying? I should think you could heal yourself, with your shape-changing ability."

"Some hurts we can do that with, but not these. I shall soon be dead."

"Then what's all that about Gnoth? Was she a Fleurian or a zooid?"

Zdion indicated the female corpse by a head-movement. "That Gnoth was a zooid."

"D'you mean there was a real one on Fleury?"

"There was. The real Gnoth was the offspring of Senemos. We are bisexual, you know. Gnoth took the form of a Terran female so that Palma should have one of our race to deal with, with whom he could feel at ease. We did not count on Palma's becoming imbued with sexual passion towards Gnoth.

Nor did we know he was mad, even by your standards—a paranoiac, I think you call them. As we do not have that form of insanity, we did not recognize it.

"So Mr. Palma made plain to Gnoth his unnatural lusts, and also his wish for Gnoth's help in stealing the proteoid formulae. When Gnoth, filled with horror, tried to stop him, Mr. Palma killed Gnoth. This murder seems to have affected him more than that of Senemos, for, when he returned to earth and made his fortune, he built a replica of Gnoth in the latter's human form. From watching him closely for several months, I think he convinced himself that this zooid was really Gnoth, and that the rest of his tale of eloping with Gnoth from Fleury's planet was also true."

Zdion coughed. Some fluid, neither human blood nor zooidal haemoid, trickled down his chin into his forked beard. To Vera he seemed little by little to be resuming his reptilian form.

THE LAST bond parted. She stood up, ignoring her nudity. After all, Zdion was not human, and there was wealth to be had by ready and resolute action.

As her own clothes had been ripped to pieces, she looked around for a substitute. The only one was the gown on the headless body of Gnoth. To strip the body was a desperate deed, even if it was only a zooid, but there was no help for it. She said: "Well, I'm awfully grateful to you anyway, you poor thing. Isn't there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. Hand me that bundle of papers that Mr. Palma dropped."

"What for?"

"To destroy them. It is what I came for."

"You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Well—uh—Sigmund ran his factory on a day-to-day basis. He made

the critical settings himself from notes he took from these papers. Without them, the whole business would stop."

"It need not, if Earth will make a fair bargain with Fleury's planet."

"But think of the money!"

"Your Terran money makes no difference to me. It is stolen wealth."

"What of that?"

"Though your ways and ours differ in many respects, we both believe theft to be wrong."

"Well, Sigmund owes me something for the horrible fright he gave me. So there!"

Vera struggled into Gnoth's gown. It fitted her like a tent, but at least she could get home without being arrested. She pulled the gown up through the girdle so that she should not trip over it, picked up the roll of papers and started out.

"Mrs. Tobias! Give me those papers!" said Zdion.

Vera walked faster.

"Come back!" cried the Fleurian.

"You do not know what you are doing!"

He started to crawl. She ran up the stone stairs hearing Zdion's dying cries behind her.

The palace seemed deserted. No doubt there were other zooid servitors, but Vera had no wish to investigate. All she wanted was to get into her little car and speed home with the protooid formulas. Then a clever girl like

her could find some way to extort a fortune from Sigmund Palma, Inc. for their return. Not so much as if she had married and committed Palma, but enough to give her the comfortable income for which she had long lusted. Palma might be dead, but there would be heirs and executives of the company...

She got her overcoat from the cloak-room and unbolted the massive door. Outside it was dark and starlit. In the dim light of the gas-torches she could see her little car standing by the far bank of the moat. Little orange high-lights danced upon its surface, reflecting the flames. A mist was beginning to rise from the moat. She started across the drawbridge.

Halfway across, a swish made her look up. The wyvern was swooping at her.

With a little shriek she turned back to the castle. A huge reptilian head, with writhing tendrils, rose from the moat on a long neck and barred her way.

She turned back towards the far end and started to run. But the unicorn appeared at that end of the drawbridge, horn lowered and hooves thundering on the timbers in a charge.

Just as they closed in, Vera remembered that one had to have a password. Zdion could no doubt have given it to her...



WHAT THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY SEAL MEANS



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It was most condescending of this Solarian to notice a humble evangelist of the stars, and his wife. In fact, Jathan considered it virtually unheard-of.



THE GOLDEN ONES

by **CHARLES A. STEARNS**

(author of "The Regenerators")

illustrated by Luton

JATHAN, EVANGELIST of the stars, stood with great, awkward hands clenched in the loose sleeves of his flowing robe, and the knuckles of the fists were white. For the better part of three hours it had amused his mate to ignore her husband in favor of concertedly ogling the most eligible male in the starliner's lounge, a classic-featured young man in bluest parasele mesh uniform with pure gold crescents upon the shoulders, signifying—nay, boasting to the universe—that this gorgeous creature was a mighty Solarian.

Now Jathan was not often consumed by jealousy. He had always persuaded himself that Alania's innocent flirtations must be as much an integral part of her charm as her red hair. (In their own corner of the galaxy, red hair had been an extreme rarity—a thing for pride and rejoicing.) But for some reason, he was now reminded of the drabness of his own vulture-like features beneath this full, brown beard that had not even the grace to be glossy; that his long hair had once been termed by a brash barber of Narsus, "the most unsightly male plummage I have ever

beheld". That under the folds of his coarse, featureless robe, within the huge, ungainly frame, even his spirit might turn out to be a shabby thing among this urbane company.

If one is not a Solarian at birth he never will be a Solarian, and that should be an end to that; but as a child, sprouting in the primitive environment of his remote world, Jathan had dreamed of this elite glory, and envy, like its emerald-eyed brother, he now found to be no respecter of age.

Alania was like a child, and she belonged to him so completely and trustingly that he could forgive her a thousand such venal wrongs. Nevertheless, there is *some* honor in being the wife of a Brother of Truth, and the prestige of the Cloth should be upheld at all times.

When he had found Alania, she had been the unlettered daughter of an obscure barbarian chieftain of Sardis Four; and occasionally—as her father had warned him the day of their marriage—she needed a good, soul-stimulating beating to remind her of this humble beginning. However, the Creed of the Brotherhood specifically prohibits striking one's wife, and the alternate solution (not specifically prohibited) was impracticable. A Brother, encumbered by his heavy, ankle-length frock, simply could not get his foot that high.

Monotonously she kept tugging at his sleeve.

"What is it now?" said Jathan.

"Have you noticed that Solarian, Jathan? Isn't he tall and *superior-looking*. Let's go over and talk to him."

Jathan flinched at the twisting of this subtle dagger in his heart. "That would be presumptuous of two colonials," he said. Then, as an afterthought, "Besides, I doubt that he is so much as one quarter-inch taller than I am."

ALANIA, pouting, pressed her nose against the port-hole. She could not see anything because they were in

the space-rift. "We never get to meet anyone important," she said tragically.

"Pull in your lower lip, lest it be struck by a meteorite. Each of the common peoples, my dear, whom the Brotherhood seeks to teach, is important. The rimsmen, the advance settlers and prospectors, even the forgotten colonial worlds beyond Polaris. They are the new blood, the workers and the builders, the white hope of the human race."

"Oh, you needn't recite the entire Creed to me," Alania said. "Besides, if you don't speak to him, I shall; he looks very friendly and democratic to me."

"Those are not the adjectives which occur to me," Jathan said. "However, it is perfectly clear that we are going to have a scene, except that I submit to your whim." He strode over to the port lounge and flung himself down opposite the Solarian, who smiled a dazzling, white-toothed smile, and nodded in a manner that could only have been construed as friendly and democratic.

"Dull trip, isn't it?" the Solarian said.

"Only if one is not able to exercise the eternal companionship of the soul," said Jathan, sourly.

"Ah! You're one of those Vegan philosopher fellows, aren't you? I've heard a great deal of you; splendid work you're doing among the barbarians. And you know, you're quite right about the origin of ennui." He laughed. "In any case, I've no cause to complain. I only came aboard at Alpha Centauri. Medic, you know, bound for Terra. I am Lapius Valdo, Solarian, of the Aesculapian Society of Venus."

"It is said that Solarians are never ill," growled Jathan. "Would not your skill be better applied among the afflicted of such a pest-hole planet as Procyon Six, or Gamma Capella, than Earth?"

"I daresay," said Valdo, grinning disarmingly. "But you see, I'm only going to Terra to visit friends—one of

the wealthy Citizen Regents, as a matter of fact. That's why I have to wear this somewhat spectacular uniform. Protocol, you know; makes me feel a little silly."

Someone kicked Jathan sharply upon the ankle. "Unssh!" he said, and glared at his wife, who had appropriated the seat by his side.

"I beg your pardon?" said Lapius Valdo.

"I'd like you to meet my wife, who happens to be a savage of one of the satellite systems of Vega. Alania, my dear, this man's name is Lapius Valdo, of Venus."

"How thrilling!" Alania said, extending a limp hand. "I didn't *dream* that we had such a distinguished passenger aboard!"

The Solarian sprang to his feet, covering her hand with his palm. "The Vegan philosophers do very well." He smiled. "Are all the women of Vega so beautiful?"

"M-my goodness," strangled Alania. "Is it true that all Terrans, and other Solarians are frightfully rich, and go simply everywhere, and do as they please, and that almost nobody works?"

Lapius Valdo chuckled. "Fortunately that is true only on Terra itself," he said. "There are more important things than riches or leisure."

"That is a truism," said Jathan sourly.

ALANIA IGNORED him. "And will we pass near Earth?"

"Of course. Lunar Station is the halfway point on the Vega-Arcturus run. The ship orbits there for six hours to discharge and take on cargo and passengers, and to refuel. You'll be practically within half a million miles of Terra herself." Valdo's eye caressed Alania's full-blown figure ever so lightly, and he added, "I've a splendid idea: Why not come with me and spend the afternoon on Terra? My friend, Carter, the Citizen Regent, will be glad to

have you as his guests, and you'll find Mrs. Carter very nice."

"Mrs. Carter?" said Alania. "That's a very odd title."

"It's provincial," explained Valdo; "it connotes her marital status."

"Mrs. Alania," said Alania, trying it on for dignity. "Jathan, let's *do* it. Please, Jathan!"

"Yes, please consent," urged Valdo smoothly. "It is not often that Terra sees distinguished Vegans—and who knows, Brother Jathan; you might make a convert or two."

"I would as soon try to convert the pagan gods," grumbled Jathan. He was touched, nevertheless, by that reference to "distinguished guests".

There was a sudden touch of sadness or concern in the voice of Valdo. "There are Terrans who must be sorely in need of philosophical comfort," he said. "Believe me, Vegan." His tone made Jathan look at him keenly for a hidden meaning.

"I'm dying to meet them," Alania said, throwing her arms about her husband's neck. "Oh, Jathan, darling, we may never have this chance again. Look—we're coming out of drive and there's historic old Luna out there; say you'll do it!"

"The moon appears like any other G-2 moon that I have ever seen," said Jathan, "bald and barren."

"I assure you that there is none other like it in all the universe," said Valdo. "Citizen Carter's space-gig will await us at the station. If you'll agree to come along, I promise to see that you're back by tangent hour."

Alania had begun to massage Jathan's vertebrae with her fingertips.

"Be good enough to stop that," he said.

But Alania knew quite well that Jathan's vertebrae were, in a sense, his Achilles' heel when she rubbed them with her fingers. He was still muttering of "sinful dalliance" as he went off to find their luggage.

THREE PIECES Alania had deemed it necessary to take along, and there was one of his own, as well, huge, battered and unstylish. He wrapped his mighty arms about two, took the others in his hands, and pushed his way into the crowded ship's lock where Alania and the friendly, democratic Solarian waited.

The handle came off his own. With all its assorted contents it weighed more than a hundred pounds. It dropped upon the toes of a pudgy Ligurian, who said, "Ouch, damnation!" And then, when he saw the white robe of Jathan, he tipped his calash, and said, "Sorry, Brother," and smiled a painful smile.

"The pain in your great toe is but a pale shade of the anguish which *I* feel," Jathan said. "Moreover, since I apparently have gone quite mad, I cannot be held responsible for my actions."

The fat Ligurian seemed puzzled.

Jathan bent over to retrieve the suitcase. He got his hand stepped on; his head cracked the knees of a jostling lady swathed in Venusian *glak* fur, and he said an unbrotherly word. What made it worse was that Alania glared at him for all this, in an unconscionable manner.

Soon, with considerable frost still in the air, the three of them spiraled to Earth in a sleek little rocket with a big, golden crest emblazoned upon its nose—the coat of arms of the Citizen Regent.

The continents of the venerable queen of planets were emerald blankets, floating in amethyst oceans. Doting these verdant swards, Lapius Valdo explained, were the villas of the Citizens Regent, each of whom owned much colonial property, and a vote in the Galactic Council. All industrial and commercial centers were underground.

The ship, tail-ending, lowered them to an innocent-looking meadow that suddenly opened up and swallowed them. The lock hissed open; they found

themselves stepping out into a subterranean passage, whose living floor whisked them through soft-lighted, gently winding and ascending tunnels to deposit them, at last, in a great rotunda in the center of the villa itself. The rotunda had a sort of planetarium in its dome, except that certain celestial bodies stood out huge and brightly green among the others.

"Those bright ones," whispered Valdo, "represent the planets which belong, *in toto*, to Citizen Carter. He owns eighteen of them outright, and considerable property in the Solar System besides."

"I can imagine no more ridiculous thing," said Jathan, "than for a planet to belong to one man. A world belongs to itself."

Valdo laughed. "Ethically, you're probably right, but Carter is one of the most powerful of the Terrans. And speaking of our hosts, here they come now." He nodded slightly toward one of the innumerable arches that led from the rotunda.

"What will we say?" whispered Alania.

"No special salute is required."

"Nor had *I* intended giving any," said Jathan.

BOTH OF the Terrans wore simple, blue chitons, exactly identical, except that the woman's waist was girdled by a glittering belt set with iridescent stones. Citizen Regent Carter was a slightly built man with iron-grey hair; his wife, also slight, was dark, with deep-set, tragic blue eyes.

"They're expecting us," Valdo said.

"And yet," rumbled Jathan softly, half to himself, "*I have seldom seen more fishy stares than those with which they greet us.*"

But the Citizen Regent seemed cordial enough. He had a low, pleasant voice, which yet managed, somehow, a subtle timbre of power and authority. "Welcome, Vegans—you, too, Lapius Valdo—to our home; we are happy to

have you as our guests." He bowed.

Jathan permitted himself a slight bow in return. "I had feared," he rumbled, "that you might ill-regard this unwarranted intrusion of two barbarians."

"New faces are a treat for us," the Citizen said, meanwhile gazing fixedly at Jathan's own, as though trying to recall such a face in his own memory. "Tell me, what is your title?"

"I have no title," said Jathan; "I am a teacher of Vega, bound for Arcturus upon missionary assignment."

The Citizen Regent and his wife exchanged glances. Was that relief that Jathan had seen in their eyes? Alania was spinning around on one heel, with chin in the air and mouth open, taking in the grandeur of the hall. There was an awkward silence as they stared at her.

"Perhaps you would like to be shown to your suite to rest before dinner," suggested the Citizen Regent, suddenly. "We shall have dinner on the roof to-night. It is a magnificent view. At least I once thought so." A hint of weariness in his voice.

"Capital suggestion," said Lapius Valdo. "And may I say, Brother Jathan, that you will find the hot mist baths here on Terra to have no equal this side of the Pleasure Palaces of Varna. You won't even find any robot servants to disturb you in these Ter-ran households. Everything is automatic and self-maintaining."

"You may not believe this," said Jathan, "but there are households which get along without either arrangement." He stiffened suddenly, and, throwing back his shaggy head, seemed to sniff the air for several seconds, which absolute silence reigned in the rotunda.

"What is it, Jathan?" said Alania. "What's the matter?"

"I am not certain," answered Jathan, "but there are households which smell of death in this place."

Mrs. Carter gave a little shriek, which she stifled with her hand. Citizen

Carter sprang to her side and put his arm around her, his face trembling with emotion.

"Jathan!" Alania said, "How could you!"

"It mortifies me that I often speak my thoughts aloud," Jathan said; "please forgive me."

But the Citizen Regent and his wife continued to tremble; the Citizen opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

Lapius Valdo said smoothly, "I am sure that Brother Jathan was only giving voice to some abstract fancy which occurred to him, as is common with philosophers. Doubtless he meant nothing personal, Citizen."

"It's all right," said Mrs. Carter, tightly. "If our Vegan guests will step on the blue carpet, that will take you to your quarters. And Valdo, you may have the east wing as usual."

"Yes, I'll speak with you later, Valdo," said the Citizen Regent. "My wife is feeling a little ill, and I must take her to her couch. Forgive us, Brother Jathan, for leaving you, but we shall see each other at dinner."

JATHAN and Alania did as bidden, and the carpet took them to the door of an apartment so magnificent, and high-ceilinged that Alania, with little screams of rapture, ran around touching everything to see if it could be real.

What are they frightened of? Jathan asked himself. But there was no answer forthcoming to this mystery. He walked to the great window of the central bedroom and looked out upon one of the numerous, triangular jungle gardens that lay between every two wings, and fell away in exquisite little terraces, walkways, flower beds, and arched bridges over trickling little streams to the vast, tree-strewn meadow below.

The window, he discovered, was no window at all, but merely an opening to the balcony, without even drapes to

draw. One might as decently sleep in a fishbowl.

However, Alania, who was activating every service button in sight with an airy wave of her hand, and who had already obtained eight deviled eggs, a tray of canapes, an authentic-looking roast, and a new silk gown, tailored instantly to her figure by invisible eyes, also soon discovered a manner of making the window opaque, with an image of a starlit sky and a moonrise over an ocean which seemed to lap at their very feet.

Alania, surfeited of miracles, viewed this last one with a jaundiced, but happy eye, and went over to lie down upon the glistening coverlet of the bed. Her mate's ill-humor persisted.

After a while she said, "Jathan, dear, there will be another ship from Vega in two or three weeks. Why don't we stay here and wait for it. I have never seen such a lovely, restful world. Arc-turus Twelve will be bleak, and sterile and cold, I'm sure. And they say it's inhabited by those ghastly *wheemies*, like the ones we saw at the galactic fair last year."

He shook his head. "We must be rid of this ancient planet; there is an aura of evil here. The woman is too sad. The palace is too beautiful; the sky too perfect. Also, if you must know, I dislike the Solorian medic's attitude toward you."

"What nonsense! He's only very polite and considerate, like all Solorians."

"I did not like the way he bumped against you in the airlock."

"That was only an accident. But *you!* You maimed practically everyone in the lock with those suitcases!"

"I weary of being compared to Valdo," snapped Jathan.

"And I'm getting sick of never having a place of our own. Of spending weeks at a time in warp. Of old freight rockets, and space sickness, and running from savages. Of my arms always being sore from inoculations against diseases I've never heard of."

"It is only for a few years," said Jathan, and more gently, added, "besides, we have each other."

She put her face into the pillow. "What makes you so certain that it's enough?" she said.

Jathan had sprung from a family of roaring Vegan warlords, and the Brotherhood had never completely tamed his spirit. "Stay if you like!" he bellowed.

"I *will!*" she said, and flung a slipper at him.

JATHAN went out into the garden, muttering into his beard, and kicking the heads off little red flowers which here and there overhung the walk, as his mood, now and then, reached crit, and he imagined that the flowers were each Lapius Valdo.

Beyond the valley, Sol was setting in glorious color, and the mountains of the east wore delicious-looking, pink custard icing on their heads. He knew that this was a frozen, crystallized water vapor, and suspected that the mountains, like everything else here, were artificial and were hollowed out to receive giant refrigeration machinery.

Mechanical gardeners (despite Valdo's intimations) worked ceaselessly among the flowers and shrubs. Flat, brachyurian lawn-trimmers darted swiftly here and there over the broad lawns. Among the trees, towering monsters with hundreds of articulated, scythe-like arms moved on silent treads. At the end of each arm were deadly scissors, and the knives, swiftly moving among the branches, clipped and snipped until each tree in the entire valley had become an insipidly beautiful model of uniformity. From the tree where it now worked, a long-necked bird rose in flapping terror, and was dyed red by the light of dying Sol.

On the edge of a flat dais, near a colored fountain, a slight, dark-haired boy of about eight sat, playing in the

water. Instantly Jathan's gloom lessened perceptibly.

The boy looked up. "Who are you?" he said.

"I am Jathan the Evangelist, and it is kind of you to inquire."

"I am Daryl."

"The son of my hosts, I've no doubt?"

Daryl shook his head. "Terrans hardly ever have children," he said, "because then they might become attached to them, and start a dynasty; then there wouldn't be room on Terra for everyone without crowding. Do you know what a dynasty is?"

"I know what an outrage before nature is. Who are you, then?" Who is your father and mother?"

Daryl looked puzzled. "How would I know that, when both of them died before I was born?" he said. "I belong to the Breeder Institution of Karse, and I am spending this year with Citizen Carter. But I heard them say last night that they might send me away."

"Hmm," said Jathan thoughtfully. He had just realized, with a start, that he was gazing upon that rarest phenomenon of the decade, one of the "test-tube" children of a now-discredited experiment on Mars a few years ago. He felt an immense compassion for this waif. His hand, in the pocket of his robe, closed upon something spherical and cold. He took it out and handed it to the boy. "A present," he said grandly.

THE THING consisted of several, welded, concentric metallic rings, held together by a clear, glasslike substance. Within the hollow sphere thus formed, several tinier spheres, some no larger than a matchhead, seemed to hang suspended in space—and in fact, did. Daryl took it and examined it in silence.

"It is one of the marvels of our age, I am told," said Jathan. "At least it was given me by an ancient Tithonian philosopher, who told me upon

his deathbed—though they are notorious liars on Tithon—that it was the only one in existence. Within the platinum rings, you will observe, there is an exact scale miniature of the Spican star system. The bodies are actually moving at the precise, relative rate of the Spican planets themselves, though it will require you several weeks, of course, to note the movement."

"Thank you very much," Daryl said; "it is very interesting. However, I think the rings are not platinum, but a magnetic alloy called carbalite."

"Humph!" said Jathan. "Well, perhaps you are right. I didn't look too closely. But enough of that: Why are they going to send you away?"

"I—I think it is because they are afraid of something. I can tell that something bad is about to happen here, and they don't want me around when it happens. I can tell by the way they talk."

"Afraid of what?" said Jathan tensely, seizing the boy's shoulders.

"I don't know."

HE MUST have followed wherever that maze of paths led for more than half an hour—it was getting dusk—when suddenly a voice, just above his ear, spoke to him. He looked up, and there, within inches of his amazed eyes, he beheld the second most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was seated upon the balustrade of the little balcony of the wing, or extension which lay opposite his own, and she wore an exceeding thin and sheer gown, simply clasped about one ivory shoulder. The gown clung, and flattered, and the view would have made the mouth of a lesser man go dry. More like a nymph than a mortal did she appear, smiling down at his surprise.

"Cybela is my name," she said. "I'll bet you're the Vegan teacher who arrived this afternoon. We ought to get together; I'm a barbarian, too."

"I sensed that you were no Terran. They, at least, do not go naked."

She giggled. "Oh, don't be a prude, Vegan; I belong to the Citizen Regent. And don't look so shocked; it's an old custom on this planet to keep concubines, and it's also our main export on Cygnus Seventeen."

"So that is it," said Jathan, who had heard a great deal of the girls of Cygnus Seventeen.

"And what's wrong with it, I'd like to know? Anyway, I'm clearing out in a week or two; maybe sooner. Too dull around here, and that wretched old man hasn't even been near my apartment."

"What...wretched old man?" said Jathan, strangling slightly.

"Oh, the Citizen Regent. Would you believe that he is in his eighties, and his wife nearly so old. Terrans never show their age until they're over a hundred. And *she* doesn't seem to mind in the least my being here. Terrans are so rich that they have to keep trying to find new ways of amusing themselves, but I don't think they ever succeed. They're just faddists, and the most emotionless people I've ever met. I hate cold fish, don't you? Anyway, I don't think they're nearly as sophisticated as they act. It's a kind of pose here to seem bored all of the time."

"One wonders why they live at all," said Jathan.

She sucked in her breath, with a hiss. "Just what did you *mean by that*?

He studied her face, a difficult thing at best, considering the distractions. "I do not deal in riddles, but in truth," he said; "there is something evil going on in this place."

"I wouldn't be surprised if you're right," she said, and leaned over the ballustrade in a most alluring fashion. He drew back with dignity.

"Come now," she said. "I'm not going to bite you. Tell me—*who are you, and why are you really here?*"

Valdo—resplendent in even more gold braid than before—was waiting for them with a smile on his face. A smile which was directed at Alania. "Our hosts will be along," he said. "Meanwhile, if you'd like a before-dinner *aperitif* from one of the dispenser fountains over there—?"

Jathan shook his head.

"Is there something wrong?" Valdo said.

"There are others here in a better position to answer that than I," said Jathan. "Nevertheless, I shall confront my hosts presently; and unless I am able to learn what tragedy is in the making, I shall notify the security police."

Valdo looked concerned. "You mustn't do that," he said; "I'm sure the Citizen Regent wouldn't want police intervention. I can see that I'll have to tell you what's going on. You see, I have come here on a rather grave, and delicate errand. On Alpha Centauri Regis, I learned that Citizen Carter and his wife were preparing to take the Grail."

"The Grail?"

"I'm afraid," said Valdo in a low tone, "that that is actually a euphemistic term for what really amounts to a suicide pact. It will be very difficult for you to understand; but, you see, the Terrans are an almost stagnant race, with little will for survival—and they are subject, of course, to faddism in the worst degree."

He smiled mirthlessly. "Of late the fad has been to contract for a euthanasia they haven't the courage to perform themselves, by hiring the infamous Sirian's Assassin League to do the job. The assassin is paid in advance to come and take their lives by stealth when they least expect it. This is supposed, I am told, to make life sweet again—by foreshortening it and making it so precarious that grail takers may never go to sleep at night with the assurance of waking up the next morning."

WHEN JATHAN and Alania took the elevator to the roof, Lapius

"And I have called myself barbarian!"

"You are quite right. It is horrible. But I'm afraid we have arrived too late."

"To change their minds?"

"Not that. I believe that they are already frightened enough to concede that life is very sweet after all, but I happen to know that contact with the League has already been made, and an assassin has been dispatched upon this mission."

"Cannot he be recalled?"

"Never. You see, it is a matter of honor with the League of Assassins of Sirius, now; they always get their man. That is why they have become so terrible and dreaded throughout the galaxy, and it is also why they are very expensive. They are all masters of disguise and illegal entry. The assassin may be within the walls of the villa at this very moment."

"Yes," said Jathan thoughtfully. "And a killer's heart may beat in the loveliest breast."

"Quite right. At least, this was extremely foolish of them, and—Ssh! Here they come now."

THE CITIZEN REGENT and his wife entered, arm in arm, and nodded gravely to their guests. Each had an almost funereal look. The night was starry above the white covered table, already magically laden with steaming tureens that vanished and appeared at will beneath its surface. There was no breeze. Jathan himself, despite his anxiety, had somehow become sensible to the beauty and tranquillity of this little planet, like a gentling mantle over the strife of the villa.

The Citizen started to take a bite of vegetable, and put it back in his plate. "I am not very hungry," he said. And both of them looked at Jathan. Not an accusive look, but the look of rabbits in a trap.

"You wrong me," Jathan said; "I am not your enemy. Besides, it would be impossible to poison food in one of the

L-type synthesizers which you have here."

The Terrans stared. "What do you know of such things as L-type synthesizers?" said Valdo.

"My husband," Alania told him, "used to be one of the most famous physicists of Vega before he became a Brother, and gave up everything."

"Then you are not assassins?" said the Citizen Regent. "Who are you, then?"

"The Brotherhood," said Alania, "is supposed to be an organization of scientists who have been aware for several generations that mankind has been forgetting the moral values and the real meaning of life as he progresses too fast in the field of physical science. He has outstripped, in this medium, his emotional level. You see, I know it all by heart; I doubt if it means a thing."

"It is why," said Jathan slowly, "such men as the Assassins are allowed to exist; and it is the reason that the death-wish has grown common. I now perceive that the mighty Terrans need our ministrations worse than the barbarians." He seemed to reach over the table quite casually, and his hand suddenly lashed out, snatched a salt shaker from between the Citizen and his wife, and threw it over the parapet. It tinkled as it smashed into the rock garden below.

"Why did you do that?" Alania said.

"It was just that the salt cellar contained crystals which were about to release a deadly cyanogen preparation into the air that is now being breathed by our hosts. There is no wind tonight, you will observe, and the vaporization had already begun."

"But how did you know?" said Citizen Carter.

"The prismatic effect of the light upon the crystals," Jathan said. "Also, the gas has a barely discernable odor to the trained nostrils. Mine, as I have indicated to you before, are highly trained; doubtless we shall all have severe headaches in the morning."

"If we live until morning," said Mrs. Carter."

"Something moved over by those palmettos at the edge of the roof!" whispered Alania. "I saw it."

LAPIUS VALDO sprang up from his chair and made a leap into the shadows. He emerged with the struggling figure of a girl in his arms. It was Cybela, but she now carried a long, shiny weapon in her hands which Jathan recognized as a deadly variety of paralysis gun, and she was trying to paralyze Valdo by clubbing him upon the head with it, which is as good a way as any. But he got it and shoved her roughly into his chair at the table.

"Whew!" he said. "She's strong as a tiger."

"She!" Mrs. Carter said. "I should have known it." Despite what Cybela had told him this afternoon, it seemed to Jathan that her voice carried very definite overtones of that green-eyed emotion which plagued ordinary barbarians.

"Many assassins lead double lives," said Valdo, smiling. "Some of them you may know quite well, and then one day—" He drew his finger suggestively across his throat.

"But—" said Cybela. Valdo twisted her wrist, and she did not finish.

There was only the sound of her heavy breathing for several seconds.

"But she is not the assassin, Valdo," Jathan said at last. "*You are.*"

Lapius Valdo grinned good-naturedly. "Now why would you say that, philosopher?"

"Because I saw you remove the gas filters from your nostrils a moment ago and throw them over the edge of the roof. Also I have suspected you for several hours—since I have been certain, ever since our meeting, that you are not a Solarian as you pretend to be."

The grin died. "How could you guess that?"

"Too friendly; not arrogant enough. A real Solarian would never make passes on the sly at my barbarian wife; he would be much more direct. Doubtless, if you had been a Solarian I would have killed you here now."

Lapius Valdo now laughed outright, as his eyes flicked admiringly over Alania with new boldness. "I had such high hopes for the two of us," he said, "but now you must all die—unless, my dear, you'd like to come along with me? No? Well, then, I must destroy you all, since I am bound to carry out my instructions. Our honor, and our perfect record must be kept pure and whole. Well, well, it's what comes of trying to mix business and pleasure."

"Have you not forgotten something?" rumbled Jathan."

"What is that?" said Valdo, lowering the gun for the barest instant.

"I hate soup," roared Jathan, and quickly flung the contents of his bowl in Valdo's face.

CYBELA sprang up and grabbed his right arm, causing him to drop the weapon, but he wrenched loose and sprang for the edge of the roof, disappearing over the railing.

In a moment Jathan found out how he had done it. A slender, silken thread hung from a tiny grapnel. Jathan, no acrobat, lowered himself cautiously upon this thread, praying that it would sustain him. He burned his hands severely, but made it to the garden.

"A dark figure moved across the meadow below him. He set out after it with great, distance-eating strides that would have amazed the other Brothers. And he was gaining, too, for the moon was bright.

But just as he had hopes of closing in, the shadow of one of the trees cut off the fugitive from view, and he drew up, wheezing, and looked around to see where Valdo might have gone. Open meadow was all about him, but nothing moved upon it.

Just in time he heard the faint whis-

per upon the grass behind him. He wheeled, and saw one of the fifty-foot leviathan tree-trimmers bearing down upon him.

Barely in time he threw himself to one side, but the juggernaut, ignoring him, went busily about its work as its multitudinous fingers snipped and snicked among the branches of the tree.

Jathan went back to the villa.

"He got away?" the Citizen Regent said.

"I did not catch him."

Cybela, until now forgotten, spoke sharply. "I think you ought to know, Citizen, that you and your wife are under arrest for attempting the Grail. There will be a pretty stiff fine, I should think."

"And who are you?"

"Unless I am mistaken," said Jathan, "she is the universe's most wanton policewoman."

"Galactic Patrol," Cybela said. "And I suppose you think it's a bowl of cherries in my line of work. We heard about this little escapade some time ago, and that's why I got myself established here; I've always wanted to catch a Sirian Assassin."

Jathan had gone into their suite and returned with their bags. "It is time for us to leave now," he said to the Citizen Regent. "In less than an hour we must be on our way to Arcturus."

"You are needed here," the Citizen Regent said, hanging his head. "There

are many people here who have lost the meaning of life, even as we had, and must be shown the way again."

"Perhaps we shall return to this planet, so beautiful, so favored, so honored by history. But so decadent in our time. But for now—" Jathan turned to his wife. "Are you coming with me?"

"What do you think!" she said, throwing her arms around him.

"My, my!" Cybela said, luridly winking at Jathan. "If I didn't have to stay here and take the Citizen and his wife to trial, I'd go along too; barbarians are so virile. But I must stay and hunt for Lapius Valdo, anyway. I assure you that I am going to take that scoundrel back with me."

Jathan gazed out across the moonlit meadow. The great tree trimmer had finished its tree and gone on to the next.

"I do not think you will take Valdo back," he said.

"You don't?"

"At least not all of him," said Jathan.

But the drama of the moment was ruined when the handle came off the suitcase, and it jarred open when it hit the floor, and dozens of shiny, spherical models of the Spican star system rolled about the floor at their feet.

And Alania knelt, without a word, to help him gather them up.



Convention News

THE NEW YORK Science Fiction Convention: The first issue of *The Journal of the World Science Fiction Society* has appeared and is loaded with convention information. Arthur C. Clarke, Convention Guest of Honor, is discussed in articles by Bill Donaho and James Blish. The reasons behind the selection of the Biltmore Hotel are given, and several contests are announced for convention members. Secretary Art Saha informs us that there will be many surprises, most of which will be announced. With

the convention being held in New York City, the availability of big-name speakers is tremendous, so the committee is waiting somewhat before scheduling a definite program. Whether you plan to attend or not, get your \$2 registration fee in right now! This convention is going to be the greatest. As many as 2000 people are expected. Make sure you are one of them. Send to: PO Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, New York.



What meaning can "going back to nature" have for people who've never been there in the first place?
But the Planners knew what was best . . .

BACK TO NATURE

by BRYCE WALTON

(author of "The Last Hero")

illustrated by KELLY FREAS

HAL ZWICKER stood on the roof of the empty apartment building and tried to feel good about what was happening. He tried to convince himself that he wasn't scared, and that he wasn't sad.

"What'll they do with New York when we're gone?" Kirby asked, as he peered through the guard rail at the sea of buildings full of empty holes.

Hal tousled his kid's dusty hair. "Never thought much about that, Kirby."

"Maybe it'll be a museum!"

"Maybe. Guess you're pretty excited about going back to nature, aren't you, Kirby?"

"Oh boy!"

"Well, the skybuss'll be along now in a little while."

"Going back to nature! Heee-yooowwww—hoooooo!"

"Kirby!" Flora yelled up through the skylight. "If you scream like that once more, you'll be put to bed the minute we get out to our five acres! Are you on the edge there again?"

"Nope, I'm clear back from the edge, Ma!" Kirby yelled.

Hal winked at Kirby, then went over and looked down through the skylight at his wife's face which blinked

white from the dimness of the 11th floor hallway. Her face was smudged with the dust of packing, and she pressed at hair turning a little gray on the edge of forty. She flashed pale gums in her strong but silent grin. But the other look was still there—the one that had been there now for three days, ever since they had gotten the decentralization order. There was something painful, a brand-new tiredness, lines not from laughing around the raincolored eyes.

"Ah honey," Hal said. "You said we were through packing that stuff!"

"Just a few little personal things, Hal, little things. They wouldn't mind a few of these little personal things, would they, Hal?"

"Well, they said we'd have everything we needed out there."

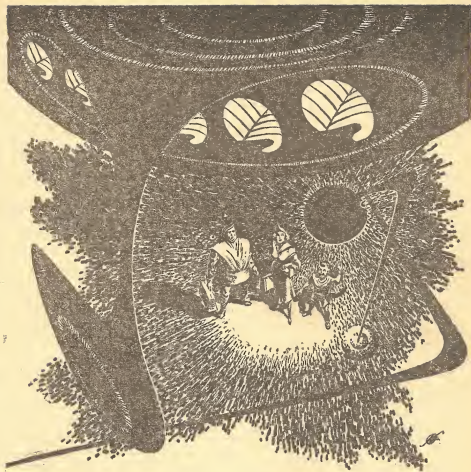
"I've only got a few little personal things," she said, and then turned quickly and ran down the hall.

"What's matter with her?" Kirby asked. "She's been like for three days."

"She's tired I guess," Hal said.

"Isn't she happy about going back to nature?"

"Sure she is!" But the words seemed dry to Hal as he looked over the silent emptiness East, where a splotch of intense summer green from Central Park



pressed hungry and swelling at the opening at the end of 68th Street. *Waiting for us to go, so it can take over*, he thought. Once, people, smoke, strings of traffic, chains of sound had held it all together; now the grass, vines, and trees were all waiting to grow up out of the cracks, work their way into the empty eyeholes of the abandoned buildings.

No sound, either; everything was damn near dead, like a huge tomb. Even the pigeons weren't burbling in their craws. *They're waiting, too, for us to go.*

The thickening evening seemed so calm, so much calmer than the blood lurching distrustfully inside Hal

Zwicker. He forced at the eagerness, pulling it into his voice in an attempt to share the bright anticipation in Kirby's eyes.

Kirby was lucky. He had it all ahead of him—clean, wonderful nature. Hal and Flora had lived all their lives in the city; and as bad as it was, it was part of them and hard to leave behind.

"But she just don't seem happy," Kirby said. "I sure am!"

"You should be, Kirby. It's going to be great having a place in the country. You'll have plenty of room to run around in, and lakes and wild birds and animals and big forests. There'll be fields and creeks to swim in, and the air will be clean and fresh. It'll be

God's air, and we'll all get back to it, and it'll be a lot better."

"I wish that skybus'd hurry!"

ONLY, HAL really didn't know what the Planners had set up, out there in the country. He could imagine what it was like and it sounded very good; it sounded just fine, especially for a growing boy.

The Planners had figured, probably, that it would be better if people didn't know the real details of their five acres until they were decentralized, and actually got out there. Maybe they figured that it was so much nicer in the country that, if you knew how nice it was, you would become too unhappy if you were among those to stay on in the city, waiting your turn. It had taken quite a while to get everybody moved out; because of their name beginning with *ZW*, the Zwickers were the last to be moved out.

"My teacher told me a lot about why we got to go back to nature," Kirby said. "Will it really be so much healthier and all?"

"Sure it will; the Planners have it all figured out. They're doing it for us."

"What's the rhythm of nature," Kirby asked.

Hal shrugged. "Hard to say. It's something you have to feel—because you're part of it, I guess." He'd read all the pamphlets the Planners had sent around, but still it was hard to understand, really—harder to explain to Kirby. "The idea is that we've been cut off from nature too long, Kirby, so we have to get back in tune with it. It's made a lot of us sick, because we've been cut off from nature. You see, nature has a rhythm, and it's like ours. When you're cut off from it, you lose a sense of belonging, a sense of being really in, a part of living. I—oh—you'll find out, Kirby. It's hard to explain."

"But can you have a lot more fun?"

"Sure you can. We've been cut off from the roots, and we've got to get back in tune with the rhythm of na-

ture. The seasons coming and going, the real God-given air, and the natural rise and fall of things."

It sounded fine. It was all from right out of the pamphlets. The only trouble was that Hal had lived in the city all his life; getting out into the country had been almost too much of a chore to tackle, even in the most expansive frame of mind. And even when you did get outside the city, it had been hardly getting back to nature—not with little special plots of land set off, that seemed only a gimmicked-up kind of city transferred to the country, with no-trespassing signs everywhere else—where the real country was supposed to be.

Getting in tune with nature was something Hal just couldn't explain.

Going back to nature had no meaning either because Hal had never been there.

NOW, HE was going there. Mr. Simon Dill was a field man for the International Planners, and he was taking the Zwickers back to nature.

Dill was fat, bald, red-faced, and eager in the eyes. He was also grinning, friendly, helpful, anxious to please, and squeezed tight with enthusiasm. He was also as impersonal, really, as a shoelace.

He sat across the aisle of the skybus, puffing a pipe, looking out the window at the dark streaming past, and the occasional blurred streaks of light that would have been stars if they hadn't been going by so fast.

"Now that we're under way," Hal said, "I guess it's all right to ask where we're going, Mr. Dill."

"Call me Simon," Dill said. He smiled, savoring the suspense.

The jets whispered. Hal had looked back once, then realized that there was nothing for him to see; the last light had gone out in New York City.

Kirby was lying with his head in Flora's lap, and his legs over Hal's knees; he seemed to be overcome by the excitement. Flora's eyes were wide

open, staring up into the invisible sky. Some sourceless weight lay heavy on her, and Hal could feel it, too. She was a woman he had thought he knew as well as himself; but now that he wondered about himself, he wondered about her, too.

And Kirby? Hal grinned thinly. It was a kid's face softened by sleep; but it was also the face of any kid with its wonderful dreams and a hundred thousand glittering plans. Hal envied what Kirby was dreaming about now, but was afraid of what lay behind the dim peep-hole of the future. The Planners knew best, of course; but it was pretty bad, Hal thought, to be uprooted, even from a dirty, crowded scar on the face of nature—the way the big city had been described in the pamphlets.

He had a raw, empty feeling—as though, somehow, his body had suddenly become full of holes. "Africa?" he asked.

"Right," Dill said.

Flora jerked her head around stiffly. "Africa!" The word slipped out of Flora, as though it had originated at the roof of her mouth.

Africa. A misty word in Hal's memory, a vague outline on a school map.

"Dropping right into the middle of a whole new way of life," Dill said, putting a little homey touch to the pamphlets. "You'll soon get used to it. All of us have been away from nature too long. I'll do everything I can to help you readjust; just ask me anything you want to know."

"What about my job?... I drove a heliotaxi you know."

"You'll have comparable work at the Project, Hal. Work hours are cut way down, though; that's to give you plenty of time just to relax and get back into tune with the rhythm of nature."

Flora didn't seem to have been listening to Dill at all. "Wonder what's happened to Gloria and Al Schubert."

Hal grinned a little painfully, but tried to sound enthusiastic. "I'd almost forgot about them. The way Al used

to yell up the airshaft! Wonder if they still play poker on Saturday night."

"Remember," Flora said softly, "how Gloria took Herby to Coney Island that Sunday, and she got so sick on the Twister she wouldn't even ride on an elevator for a week?" Flora turned her face quickly toward the window.

"Yeah, and Marion and Lionel... it's been six years since they were decanted hasn't it? Wonder where they are now."

"She was a funny one," Flora whispered.

"With that name," Dill said, "I'd guess they probably went to South America somewhere."

"Where at in South America?"

"Couldn't say exactly. Upper Matto Grosso somewhere."

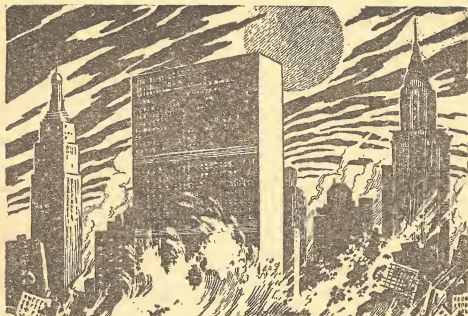
"Upper Matto Grosso..." Flora whispered.

"Yup," Dill said. "Got a friend up there; going to take a run up there some evening soon, now. They didn't decant us until they had it all worked out so we could all visit one another without any trouble. Check out a Project skybus and visit all your friends anywhere in the world, in just a few minutes. All living isolated, and next to nature—but all connected up too by the marvels of transportation. Nature won't satisfy everything; people need people."

Flora was staring at Hal. "Hal," she whispered, "what's Marion and Lionel doing way off someplace called Matto Grosso?"

He squeezed her hand. He was being called upon to say something, do something, to *know* something. But he didn't even know where they were in the night, or where they were really going. For the first time, he realized that the Planners were taking care of a lot more than he had ever thought, and that he felt pretty dumb about a lot of the things that counted.

"Doesn't matter," Dill was saying. "We have Projects everywhere. Everybody living everywhere in the world;



no national boundaries, no nations any more. Just everybody living next to nature on their own little five acres of land. Labrador, Iceland, the Sahara Desert, Africa, South America. A decentralized world at last!"

"Where in Africa is our five acres?" Hal asked.

"Tanganyiki," Dill said.

"Tanganyiki!" Flora put her face against Hal's chest.

Kirby jerked upright. His eyes were bright, and he turned and pressed his nose into the glass. "Where'd you say we're going?"

Flora moved her lips slowly. "Tanganyiki."

"Huh?"

"It's in Africa," Hal said.

Kirby's eyes seemed to spread all over his face. "Oh," he whispered. "Africa! Oh gosh—"

SIMON DILL checked the bit of luggage that was piled in the center of the living room. Then he turned to where Hal stood with his arms around Flora and Kirby. Kirby's eyes kept roving toward the shaded windows. Hal

felt a peculiar shiver and listened for some sound—for wind maybe, something. But he couldn't hear anything.

"Africa!" Kirby said.

"Right," Dill replied. "Five acres all your very own. Guess you want me to show you around the place now. I'll brief you a little."

They followed Dill through the modern cottage, among the glass walls and green plants, from room to room. A guest room; a room for Kirby; a den for Hal, and then the kitchen for Flora.

"All automatic," Dill said, with a great deal of pride. Flora stood stiffly in the center of the kitchen, surrounded by gleaming metal, and Dill revealed a panel covered with dials. He turned a dial and pressed a button. Hal heard a soft murmuring begin in the walls, in the floor. The entire house seemed to come alive, to breathe. "And now it's ready to go; there's a pamphlet there in that cabinet. It's full of diagrams and charts, and all the directions for running things."

Back in the living room Kirby again asked impatiently to go outside. Dill went to the wall and opened a small

sliding panel. Inside were a number of dials and buttons. He pressed a button; the rear wall of the living room slid open. There was a wall of dark air.

"How come it's dark in Africa already?" Kirby asked.

Dill smiled. Hal wiped at the sweat coming out over his upper lip. "That's funny," Hal said. "I thought it would be pretty hot here."

"All of Africa isn't hot; there's all kinds of temperatures in Africa," Dill explained. "But that doesn't matter to you, anyway; the temperature on your five acres is anything you want it to be. You control it; you control everything in your five acres!"

Dill worked the dials. "Everything, friends. That explains this day and night business too, the weather, everything. You can make it day or night, or any degree of light and shade you want."

As he demonstrated with the buttons, a wind came up suddenly beating at the walls and whirling through the living room. Kirby grabbed Hal's wrist, and then the wind abruptly died.

Dill laughed, pressed a button. A line of lightning cracked across the darkness; thunder roared. Flora jumped, and held Kirby tight. Dill pressed another button, spun a dial. The sun came out and lay over a green lawn, a sloping hill, and somewhere, Hal thought, reflecting from water.

"There it is," Dill said dramatically. "Your five acres!"

HAL FELT himself straining his face toward a dubious horizon. Kirby walked to where the patio began, and looked across it over the grass and a grove of trees. "You can make it day or night, whenever you want?"

"Sure—sun, rain, wind, anything or everything. Fingertip control."

"I'm tired," Flora said; "I'd like to go to bed now and get some sleep."

Kirby took another step, then bent forward a little and squinted. "What's that? I can see for a way, then it just looks sort of misty like."

"Well," Dill explained, "I only lit up *your* five acres. Light comes out of the ground, out of the air even. You can vary it, make it soft or bright. See!"

"What's that—a fence or something there?" Kirby asked.

"Yes, that's a fence. It goes round your five acres, son, including part of the lake so it's safe for you to swim and take boat rides. The fence is highly charged though, so be careful. It keeps things clean, sterilized; keeps dangerous bugs, germs, and animals all out. You won't find even a microscopic animal of any kind in that lake there inside the fence!"

"Can I go fishing, then?" Kirby asked.

"Only on Tuesdays. Then they let fish inside the fence two at a time into your lake acreage. You can go hunting, too." Dill stood there with his pipe stuck in his mouth, leaning back a little.

"With a real rifle and all?"

"Sure, on Saturdays from 1 to 7 p.m., Project Time. They'll let a deer—or something like that through the fence—and you can shoot it. You can check rifles from the Project Armory. Of course, you're a little too young for that, Kirby; later though. That's part of getting back to nature."

Dill moved a dial to soften the light outside, then he took Kirby's hand. "Want to look around the grounds?"

"I'm tired," Flora said. She looked tired; her face was pale, and her mouth was a tight line. "We've got lots of time to look around, Hal."

"I want to see it now," Kirby said: "Gosh, this is *Africa*!"

"You and Hal go on, then," Flora said. "I—I'll just rest a while."

Hal hesitated, then followed Kirby and Dill.

"You two hurry back now," Flora

said. She stood there, and after Hal had walked a ways he couldn't make out her face, but only her body standing there like a silhouette. He tried to laugh. "Don't turn on the rain while we're out here."

She didn't say anything.

THEY WENT around groves of trees and Dill explained how there was a nice balance to the landscape, pointing out the one sloping hill, trees, the lake front, a little creek moving across the corner of the five acres.

Then they stood on the white smooth sand of the beach. Hal stared down into the glassy water. Somewhere he thought he could hear waves beating, but there was scarcely a ripple here. He could see clear to the bottom that moved out in a smooth fall toward the fence that came up above the surface, out where it curved in toward the beach on either side, and moved on up over the land and out of sight. An odd fence. Unless it was pointed out, you would hardly know it was there; it blended with the water, with the grass and trees. It was almost impossible to make out anything on the other side of the fence in any direction.

It was impossible. Just a misty blur, and a kind of muted sound out there, too; but Hal couldn't make out what the sounds were.

He gripped Kirby's hand. Something was stirring in Hal. He didn't know what it was; it frightened the hell out of him. It was some kind of very bad feeling toward Dill, and toward something bigger than Dill; but the fear was too strong, and Hal couldn't think about what the feeling was.

Kirby was looking down into the water then around the softly lit land. Slowly he looked up at Hal. Something in the look cut at Hal's strength. The look was somewhat the same as it had been sometimes when Kirby had come running in in the evenings, all excited with hunger, and Flora had told him he'd have to wait until dinner time.

Only it was worse—a lot worse kind of a look, this one was. A kind of squeezing puzzlement, a deep drowning kind of bewilderment.

Kirby ran across the beach and sat down on the lawn. He touched the grass. "It felt different back home. Kind of wet like. Smelled different, too."

He looked at Hal. "There was bugs in it. If you got down and looked close, you could see all kinds of little bugs and worms and things."

Dill laughed. "No bugs or germs here, son. This place is all sterilized."

"Trees had birds, too, and squirrels."

"You can get a bird permit," Dill said, "and have a couple of birds brought in. But no squirrels—rodents carry diseases. And you've got to be careful about the birds, too—have them sterilized all the time."

Hal wanted to do something about the way he felt, and even more, about the way he knew Kirby felt. But how could you fight against some vague kind of disappointment, when you couldn't think of anything better? Or when you knew that the Planners were only thinking of your own good?

Hal went over there and looked more closely at the water. It was dead, he thought. He started to touch it, then he jerked his hand back and got up slowly to his feet. Moving heavily, he lifted Kirby and pulled him along back toward the house.

"Yup," Dill said, "everything under perfect control. We'd never have gotten everybody back to nature unless we had been absolutely sure we could control everything."

AFTER THEY had a silent snack, and Kirby and Flora had gone to bed, Hal stood in the darkened living room looking out into another darkness he didn't know was real, or whether it was his; and in a while now, maybe it wouldn't make much difference.

He looked into the night out there

for nothing he could name, and the silence moved into him like air filling a sagging balloon. He remembered the vaguely-lost sounds—the rumbling and roaring of the city that seemed soft and soothing to him now, and the other muted city noises, the underground rumble of the trains, the distant cough of a car, the hydraulic whine and gasp of a bus door. He remembered once walking along 4th Street windless alongside the park, quiet except for the musical Italian voice singing from an open-air store. Now the city, the millions of faces he had known, just a cloud fading into a self-dialed sky...

A rush of sweat came out over him and he jumped to the panel and savagely twisted at the dials. But the sun that appeared had a dark murkiness that made him uneasy; he turned another dial, rapidly, and felt the way his breath tore at his throat. A moon rose, and pale light rippled through the glass walls. He felt it growing, a kind of glacial fever of aloneness.

He turned a dial. The dark came in again, criss-crossed with lightning, and ripped with rumbling rolls of thunder. Then the rain came full and whispering, and Hal stood there trying to recapture that gentle music of the rain

in the city night. He pulled hard to close the gulfs threatening to open wider between his thoughts.

And then he readjusted the dials to the way they had been before, and everything was absolutely still, absolutely quiet in his five acres.

He went to bed. He lay beside his wife in the dark. Her body was stiff and he knew she was awake; but he dared not say anything, because he felt a kind of shame because he had nothing to say, no hope to relieve whatever it was that lay around them.

He wondered what was on the other side of the fence, and he wondered if it was like this in Tanganyiki.

There was something demanded of him—things he should say to Kirby and Flora, some way of clarifying things; but right now he couldn't seem to think of anything. For too long now, the Planners had seemed to know what was right.

It would take a while, he guessed, to figure things out for himself.

Meanwhile he lay there and waited for whatever time he might choose to turn the dial that would make it tomorrow.



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I JUST CAN'T SEE IT

by Richard H. Macklin, Ph. D.

THERE HAVE been cries, of late, to the effect that "science fiction is no longer based on science." The complaint usually ends up: "Now, in the old days, S-F writers really extrapolated on known science."

Well, now, maybe they did. But their extrapolation was usually unscientific, or their premises were wrong.

Now, don't misunderstand me; as a physicist, I can definitely see the worth of science-fiction. It encourages people to think; it has a definite value in scientific thought today. The laws of probability alone make science-fiction writing worthwhile. If enough thinkers put their minds to work on a problem, at least *one* of them might come up with the right answer.

But the question here is whether science-fiction is actually "scientific" in the proper sense of the word. In other words, is it logical? Is it entirely based on known facts?

In a good many instances, I'm afraid it is not. Too often, the author had

taken a single, isolated, scientific fact and extrapolated from it without regard to other related facts. In this series of articles, we'll take a look at this kind of thinking, see what is wrong with it, and go on from there.

This is *not* a debunking spree; it is a critical analysis. In one of his best editorials, the editor explained the why and wherefore of a critic. It's a matter of personal attack to improve something that one loves; I intend to attack science-fiction for the same reason (though not with the same vehemence) that I attack my children when they do something wrong. I'm not trying to cut anyone's throat; but if they're out of order, they'll have to be put down.

So be it; let's get on with the hatchet work.

We'll attack it concept by concept, and see if we can get rid of the muddy thinking, so that we can go on and really get to solving these problems. If my classification of concepts is arbi-

trary, that's because there is no way to classify truly great concepts except alphabetically, and who wants to do that?

Now, mind you, I'm not going to attack concepts that might be called "supertechnical"; in other words, concepts which go above and beyond our present knowledge of science. The experiments of Dr. Rhine, for instance, are above reproach—as far as modern science is concerned. We don't have enough data. We can no more prove or disprove the existence of *psi* powers, at this stage of the game, than we can prove or disprove the existence of God. Or, to put it in another way, we can prove the existence of *psi* powers *only* in the way we can prove the existence of God—through sheer abstract logic, not through experiment. We may do either, or both, on an empirical level someday; but it's beyond us now. For the present, we can rely only on faith and ratiocination.

Therefore, we'll simply have to attack these concepts on the basis of what we know today.

THE CONCEPT of invisibility has been with us since before the dawn of history. Dr. Jung describes it as a basic human desire to hide from others—to hide from our own guilt. Could be. At any rate, men have thought of invisibility for millenia. Magic cloaks, magic words, magic pills, and magic gizmos *ad infinitum* have been used throughout human literature to give someone the gift of becoming unseeable by his fellow creatures. With the coming of science fiction, we find various "scientific" explanations of how this might be possible.

One of the earliest is H. G. Wells' "The Invisible Man". The idea is simple. According to Wells, what makes a man visible is the high index of refraction of the colorless constituents of the body, and the pigments of the hair, eyes, and blood. Griffin, the Invisible Man, has found a way to elim-

inate these offending properties. By using a chemical he has discovered, he bleaches the hemoglobin of the blood, and fills in the intercellular interstices so that the human body has the same refractive index as the air. He doesn't need to bleach his hair or his eyes, since he's an albino.

Sorry, Mr. Wells, but it won't work. In the first place, the fluids within the cells of the human body *do not* have the same refractive index as air, and no chemical could make them so. One of the most transparent substances we know is glass—various mixtures of silicon dioxide and other transparent minerals. Now, almost anyone has seen so-called "invisible" glass—pieces of flat glass which have had their surface reflection reduced by means of magnesium compounds, et cetera. Since they're perfectly flat, the phenomenon of refraction isn't noticable: every light ray goes straight through.

Suppose we had a human body made of glass. Think you couldn't see it? You sure as hell could! Even with a magnesium fluoride coating, it would stand out like a flashlight in Carlsbad Caverns. There's a great deal of difference between invisibility and mere transparency; the human body isn't flat, like a piece of window-glass, so you'll have various curvatures to contend with. These curvatures will effect bending of the light going through them, as a lens does. A very good camera lens is coated with the same stuff that makes an "invisible" display window non-reflective, but I never heard of anyone who couldn't see a camera lens.

Or, look at it this way: Even air doesn't always remain invisible. Transparent, yes, but not invisible. Ever see the "heat waves" over a fire or a radiator? This is the effect caused by mixing fluids—gases or liquids, they're both technically fluids—of different densities. The hot air has a different density than the cooler air surrounding it, and you get refraction—bending of

light waves—which renders the hot air currents visible. Now, if air can be visible in air, how in the devil can you expect something as dense as human flesh and bone to become invisible? You can't; it just isn't possible.

LET'S TAKE a look at the other part of Wells' theory: the bleaching of the blood.

The red color of blood is due to an iron-bearing compound known as hemoglobin, a vitally necessary protein chemical; without it, you die.

Now it so happens that one very easy way to kill a man is to interfere with the vital chemical ability of hemoglobin. The stuff carries oxygen around the body, by combining with oxygen in the lungs and giving up that oxygen to the cells, which use it to oxidize sugar. The cells have to do that in order to live. If you give a man carbon monoxide, the hemoglobin turns a bright cherry-red and refuses to take on any oxygen; you've ruined the man's hemoglobin, and he dies. You can do the same thing with cyanide; the man's blood will turn blue—and, again, he dies. Therefore, any chemical which acts on hemoglobin is liable to kill a man because it reacts *first* with the part of the molecule which is most vital—the part that carries the oxygen.

You don't like that argument? Perhaps, you say, there could be a chemical which would react with another part of the hemoglobin molecule without disrupting its oxygen-bearing ability? According to modern chemical theory, there isn't any such chemical, but let's say there is. *It still couldn't bleach the molecule!* Why? Because the color of hemoglobin is due to the iron in it. And every iron compound, *without exception*, is colored. Iron compounds vary in color from a light yellow-green to a dark purplish-black. But they're all colored—all of them. And without iron, hemoglobin won't work.

So the best we can expect from H. G. Wells' method of invisibility is a transparent, yellow-green corpse. A nice effect, but *not* invisibility.

There is one other thing which plagues not only this method, but almost all other methods of invisibility: How is the poor guy supposed to see?

In the Wells method, it would be impossible. A totally transparent man would be completely blind. In the first place, if his ocular lenses had the same index of refraction as air, they would be unable to focus an image upon the retina. In the second place, if the retina were invisible, too, it couldn't record the image. Sight is based upon the presence of a photosensitive dye called "visual purple"; if the dope that Mr. Griffin took bleached that, too, our invisible man would be wandering about in total darkness; his eyes would be unable to record the light that passed through them.

HAVING taken a look at a typical case, let's make a few general statements before we go on.

Just exactly what do we mean by invisibility? Well, let's define it as the ability to render a normally-seeable object unseeable. That eliminates our having to argue with the person who says that air is invisible. Sure it is; but it isn't normally visible, anyhow. What we're looking for is something that will make, say, a man or a spaceship invisible.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can put a man in a totally dark room and claim he's invisible. That ain't fair, for obvious reasons. Nor can we hide him behind a wall, or put him a million light years away. That would, of course, render him invisible, but that's not what we mean, and we all know it.

Let's assume that I am standing five feet in front of you, on a clear day, and that there is nothing wrong with your eyes. If you can't see me, I'll submit that I must be invisible, according to the way we have defined the term.

How many ways can this be done? We'll attack them in order, and see if it can be done at all.

Number One: Making the body capable of transmitting light waves without distortion.

We've already examined the Wells case, so let's go on to another way of doing the same thing. Here's a quotation from John W. Campbell, Jr's "Piracy Preferred" (*Amazing Stories*, June 1930):

"It was found back in the early days of radio, as early as the first quarter of the twentieth century, that very short wavelengths effected peculiar changes in metals. It was shown that the plates of tubes working on very short waves became nearly transparent."

From this, the author builds up his entire theory of invisibility, using ultra-powerful radio waves to make objects transparent.

Now, the only thing wrong with this is that it just isn't so; there is no such effect on the plate of electronic tubes. The *extrapolation* is fine, but it has no basis in fact. During the twenties, one observer claimed he found such an effect, but neither he—nor anyone else—was able to duplicate it. Obviously, the glow within the tube confused the observer, and later experiments proved that the effect did not exist. Mr. Campbell, hadn't checked on the validity of his information, thus drew an erroneous conclusion which forced erroneous extrapolation. He was neither the first nor the last science fiction writer to fall into this type of error, and there's one thing that can be said about "Piracy Preferred" which usually can't be granted to stories extrapolated on erroneous basis: If the author had been on solid ground, his extrapolation might have proved correct. As it was, he was in the position of a man trying to build a skyscraper in a swamp.

In any case, however, if the light went *through*, the person would be blind as a bat.

NUMBER TWO: *Bending light rays around an object so that things become visible on the other side of it.*

On the face of it, there is nothing wrong with the idea. There is a rather clever little gadget you can build for a couple of dollars that will convince your unscientific friends that you have an X-ray or spy beam. It consists of two hollow pillars resting on a hollow base. Between the two pillars is a pedestal, upon which can be placed a book, or a brick, or what-have you. Each of the pillars appears to have a tube going through it, and they are lined up so that if you look through one tube, you can see through the other. But—if you put a brick on the pedestal, you can see right through it to the end of the other tube!

The trick, of course, is simply that the gadget is a double periscope. The light enters one tube, strikes a mirror, and is reflected down to the base of the hollow pillar, across the inside of the hollow base, up the second pillar, and out the second tube. In other words, it goes *around* the brick. But whatever is in front of the objective tube looks oddly distant. The light has traveled farther, so it makes things look farther off—like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. And there in lies the catch to the whole system.

In "Jetta of the Lowlands" (*ASTOUNDING Stories of Super Science*, October 1930) the method of refracting light around an object is vaguely explained by mentioning the fact that light rays are bent in a magnetic field. And so they are; but it's evident that the author, Ray Cummings, had no idea of the power required, or the strength of the magnetic field necessary to do the trick. It would require a generator of several billion horsepower; and our poor invisible man had better watch out, because every piece of iron and steel for miles around would start moving in his direction. Light bends very little in a magnetic field, believe me.

In Paul Ernst's "The Radiant Shell" (*Astounding Stories*, January 1932) the hero invents a sort of varnish which, when subjected to certain treatment, refracts the light around the body in the same way that a lens bends light. He even puts glass cups over his eyes so that they can be painted over.

Sidney Patzer's "The Lunar Consul" (*Wonder Stories*, November, December 1933) describes a suit which is, in the words of its inventor, made of "celluloid, and mirrors, and asbestos, and many things besides. But it works, and it is all mineral, and strong, though flexible."

Aside from the fact that celluloid is not a mineral, it sounds like a suit that refracts light—or reflects it—around the wearer. (By the way, we'll come back to this story later. Patzer had two methods of invisibility. And the other one is workable!)

Now what's the matter with all these systems? Two things: One: the invisible man couldn't see, and, Two: he wouldn't be invisible.

He couldn't see, because if the light goes around him, it can't go into his eyes. That's simple enough. In "The Lunar Consul", the suit had special eyeholes, which, naturally, left the eyes visible. As a matter of fact, the "Science Questions and Answers" department of the September 1930 *Wonder Stories* explained, with a diagram, why an invisible man using refraction would be blind.

Now, light rays, when forced to travel, a longer path than they normally would, cause distortion. Anyone in the same room with such an "invisible" body would see the distortion very plainly—it would have the effect of looking through a negative lens. Take a look at the Timmins cover for the December 1943 *Astounding Science Fiction* if you want to see what the effect would be like.

So, with this system of invisibility, we are faced with the sad spectacle of a blind man who can be spotted rather

handily by anyone who looks at him. Well—he brought it on himself.

NUMBER THREE: *The body reflects light that is invisible to the human eye.*

This is the silliest one of all, and, in every case, shows that the author either wasn't thinking, or didn't know what the hell he was talking about, and sometimes both.

Probably the earliest one was Ambrose Beirce's "The Damned Thing", in which there was an invisible monster which was ultra-violet in color. Since the eye can't see UV, the beast couldn't be seen.

Some other stories using the same principle are "The Invisible Death" by Victor Rousseau (*Astounding Stories of Super Science*, October 1930), "The Invisible Raiders" by Ed Earl Repp (*Air Wonder Stories*, October 1929), "The Man Who Could Vanish" by A. Hyatt Verrill (*Amazing Stories*, January 1927), and "The Invisible Ships" by Harl Vincent (*Amazing Stories Quarterly*, Spring 1931).

Basically, they all propose the same thing: the body is invisible because it reflects only invisible light. That sounds good, but it's purely a verbal trick. An object which only reflected, say, UV would be a dead black. After all, you couldn't see objects on the other side of it, could you? It would blot them out. The "invisible" man would be as conspicuous as W. C. Fields' nose on Marilyn Monroe's face.

Paradoxically, of all the stories mentioned above, there is only one which is practical—and that one is the silliest of them all. In Vincent's "Invisible Ships", spaceships are made invisible by gravity control. It seems the hulls of the vessels are plated with *graviloy* (whatever the hell that is), and

"...gravity is controlled by setting up vibrations in the graviloy plating. Its atoms are forced to take on a wave motion that is imparted to the surrounding ether and sets

up the artificial gravity field that propels our vessels. Making the ship invisible is the same thing, excepting a different frequency and wave form is required. We merely set the atoms of the hull plating material in motion in such a rate that the material will reflect no color whatsoever with the exception of the ultraviolet, and that, of course, is invisible to the eye."

Now I'll admit that a dead-black spaceship would be invisible unless it occulted a star, or got between the observer and the sun or moon or other nearby planet. All in all, it's a workable method of making a spaceship invisible.

But, as Lord Dorwin remarked, "It seems an uncommonly woundabout and hopelessly wigamawolish method of getting anywheahs." ("Foundation", by Isaac Asimov.) A few gallons of flat black paint would have done the job equally well.

NUMBER FOUR: *Camouflaging the object so that it blends in with its background.*

This method is a little more practical. Mammals and birds use it, and some insects—notably the stick insect and the leaf moth—have brought the process to its logical ultimate. There is even one moth that looks more like bird droppings than some bird droppings do. If skillfully done, an object in plain sight can be so successfully camouflaged that an observer a few feet away won't see it.

The main drawback is that the object can't move—unless the background is moving, too. A camouflaged warship is successful, to a certain extent, because the sea is rolling all around it and it tends to blend in with the shifting light and shadow patterns of the water.

A very grimly-humorous story, "A Job of Blending" by Victor Endersby, in the March 1934 *Amazing Stories*, is well done, in that the men are not rendered "invisible" by the camouflage suits they wear; they simply confuse

the observer, as did the jungle suits worn by the Marine Corps in the Pacific during World War II.

NUMBER FIVE: *Hypnotism.*

At last we arrive at one that is really workable. If a subject is hypnotized and told that he can't see a certain object, then, by Gosh and by Gad, he *can't* see it. Or hear it either, if he's told he can't.

This is the second method of invisibility used in Sidney Patzer's "The Lunar Consul". The villain has a gadget which he hypnotizes people so that he can't be seen. Unfortunately—as the author points out, you can't hypnotize a camera—which faithfully records the image of the "invisible" man.

So far as is known today, it takes time and hard work to hypnotize even one person into believing that something can't be seen; but so little is known about psionic machines, that I can't carp at Mr. Patzer's hypnotic gadget.

NUMBER SIX (?): *Speed.*

I've left this one until last because I'm not sure it belongs in this classification. The proposition is that the subject is moving so fast that he can't be seen; and since that might possibly be counted as a method of invisibility, I'll tackle it here.

A good many of these stories have been written, but the latest one that comes to my mind is "The Stolen Minute" by Pierre Devaux and H. G. Viot. The English translation appeared in the June and August 1953 *Science Fiction Plus*. The hero, an elderly Scientist, Claude Noroy, invents a drug with the high-sounding but chemically-meaningless name "hexo-styro-molybdenum". This drug, when taken internally, speeds up all the functions of the human body by a factor of one hundred thousand. When the French Scientist takes it, he lives and moves a hundred thousand times as fast. To him, it seems as if everything else were

moving a hundred thousand times as slow; birds seem frozen in the air, other people are as statues, and so on.

Now, I submit that this is arrant and utter nonsense. Aside from the fact that no chemical could possibly do this, let's see what would happen if it did.

A human being strolling along at a good, leisurely pace will make about two miles an hour. And our Gallic hero? Oh, he's making two *hundred thousand* miles an hour! He's a speedy little boy, he is. After the first few steps, of course, he would burst violently into flame, due to air resistance and compression. But that doesn't worry him.

Also, we can ask just where in the devil all the energy is coming from to move him so fast. From his own body? It would seem so. Hmm—the thermal energy required would be so great that his body temperature would be close to that of red hot steel!

And at those velocities, air would be as solid relatively as so much concrete. All I can say for "hexo-styro-molybdenum" is that it's a particularly nasty way of committing suicide.

Most of the other "speed-up" stories suffer from this same defeat. But any story which allows the hero to move so fast that he's invisible is definitely out of order. An abject the size of a human body is remarkably easy to detect at high speed. If you think a bullet moves too fast to be seen, try watching a sixteen-inch Naval rifle firing. If you know where to look—about ten yards in front of the muzzle, so that the smoke won't obscure it—you can see the shell flash by. And a sixteen-inch shell is a lot smaller than a man.

And finally, there's the matter of sound and shock waves. At those velocities, our high-speed protagonist would send out a shock wave that would knock out windows for miles around;

the hurricane he'd generate in his immediate vicinity would be something appalling.

MOST OF these stories, from which I have taken my illustrations, are twenty and more years old; most of them are senseless by their own internal logic. But what about later stories? Why haven't I taken them apart?

Very simple. The majority of the later stories don't try to explain their invisibility. The last "explanation" I remember was one of the Artur Blord stories by E. Mayne Hull, in *Astounding Science Fiction*, about twelve years ago. It was a complicated electronic diffraction suit. (Method #2) I notice that in her novel, *"Planets For Sale"*, which is a rewrite of the Blord adventures, Miss Hull has eliminated the explanation.

And that's what the modern trend has been. Take, for instance, A. E. van Vogt's "The Weapon Makers" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, February, March, April 1943). There is one scene where Gil Neelan is trying to escape from the soldiers of the Empress Innelda. Gil simply puts on an invisibility belt, and pretends to be another soldier. How does the belt work? Who knows? Van Vogt doesn't attempt to explain; he gets on with the story. That way, he avoids trying to base something on known science—which known science *can't* explain.

And I think that's important. Extrapolation is all right, but it must be logical. If there is an explanation, fine: Let's hear it; but if there isn't, let's not try to befuddle the reader by teaching him something that has no basis.

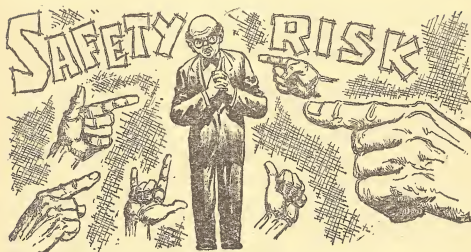
As someone once said: "It ain't what people don't know that hurts 'em; it's the facts they know that just ain't so."



In Our Next Issue, Dr. Macklin discusses

THE TWO-WAY STRETCH

"The degree of true democracy to be found in any social system is to be measured by the extent to which it protects its minorities — no matter how small, nor how obnoxious such minorities might be."



CASE RESTS

by MACK REYNOLDS

(author of "Desperate Remedy")

illustrated by Luton

THE PEOPLE'S Prosecutor turned from his witness to face the Presidor and the screen. He held his hands out, palms upward. "The People's case rests," he said, underplaying the effect. He held his stance for a moment, then said, "We have proved beyond doubt—reasonable or otherwise—that the respondent is guilty, and..."

The defense specialist said, "I demure," an apologetic note in this thin voice.

The Presidor's eyes went to him. The defense specialist cleared his throat and said, "The learned prosecutor has tested his case; it isn't time for a summation on his part. His summation period follows our defense."

The prosecutor was hurt. He

shrugged his amazement to screen and Presidor.

The Presidor motioned with a plump hand to the video-technician. "A vote, although I am hard put to understand the need for this continual reliance, on the part of the defense specialist, on trivial technicalities."

The video-technician efficiently touched knobs, pressed buttons, and the light above the presidor's desk flashed red.

"Over-ruled," the Presidor said, and to the prosecutor, "Continue."

"We have proved without doubt," the prosecutor repeated, "that the respondent, Mari Pos—note that he goes by an obvious alias—is guilty, and..." He went on to repeat much of the evidence he had presented to the audi-

ence-jury over the past two hours, and then to demand the full penalty.

At the defense table the defense specialist, who had been provided by the League for Civil Rights, whispered to his respondent, "This is bad."

The little man looked at him. "Why?"

"The fact that the Presidor has allowed this polemic, at this point in the trial, will make it clear to the audience-jury that the court is opposed to your stand."

The other was interested; he was a small man but brightly intense. "Ah? And will that effect their vote?"

"It could," the defense specialist said, his eyes shifting. Where had this man been all his life?

Mari Pos rubbed the end of his nose with a thoughtful forefinger and smiled wryly. "There would seem to be some, ah, shortcomings in your perfect democracy."

The Presidor glared down at them and the defense specialist whispered, "Please, not so loud."

Mari Pos murmured, "There would seem to be but two possibilities. One, that citizens of the perfect State are unable to form opinions of their own, based on the testimony presented—and so vote which ever way the court indicates. Two, that they are afraid to vote otherwise." He raised his eyebrows at his counselor.

The Presidor barked, "The respondent and his defense specialist will refrain from interrupting the prosecutor."

The defense specialist shrunk back into his chair, but his client nudged him and said aloud, "Aren't you going to demur to that?"

All eyes went to him and the defense specialist cleared his throat nervously. "I demur," he said; "it is necessary that I consult with the respondent. As long as our voices are kept within the whisper range, I can see no reason for our conversations to be limited."

The prosecutor, inwardly pleased,

remained silent but his face was eloquent as he looked into the screen.

The Presidor glared down from his bench. He said to the defense specialist, "Although you are present in the court as a defense specialist, the court is fully aware that you are a member of that . . . that organization, the League For Civil Rights, and is fully aware of its atavistic nature. Why the People's Democratic Dictatorship continues to allow the existence of such a cancer is not for me to comment upon. However, you should keep in mind, counselor, that although you, yourself, are not on trial, opinions that you express are, nevertheless; your own and you can be held accountable for them in the future."

The Presidor turned to the video-technician. "The question is, should the defense specialist and the respondent be allowed to disturb the prosecutor with continual banter. Put it to the vote."

The video-technician put the question, and throughout the planet all following the trial pressed the buttons on their sets which expressed their opinion. The panel above the Presidor's bench went red and the prosecutor, smirking his satisfaction, continued his monologue.

WHEN THE prosecutor had at last finished and seated himself, the Presidor's eyes went to the defense table.

The defense specialist came to his feet and faced the screen. He said, despair in his voice, "Against my advice, the respondent has insisted that he offer no defense at this time."

"You mean," the Presidor said, leaning forward, "that he wishes to change his plea to guilty?"

The defense specialist shook his head. "The plea continues to be not guilty, your honor; but he wishes to state his case himself, during his summation period."

The Presidor shrugged. "Unusual, but, as the respondent undoubtedly knows, law today is greatly in advance of the past. No case is based upon rulings of legislative bodies, upon books, or upon precedent. Each case is judged on its own merit; the countless millions of citizens of the People's Democratic Dictatorship, the World Government, decide in ultra-democratic fashion upon each case brought to the courts. If, then, the prosecutor does not demur, we will immediately make summation."

The prosecutor said suavely, "Since the respondent admits he has neither witnesses to appear for him, nor evidence to offer in his defense, the People can make no objection to his submitting his summation at this point—although it would seem difficult to summarize nothing." He allowed himself a chuckle.

The Presidor turned to the respondent. "You may address the court and the audience-jury."

The little man came to his feet and faced bench and screen. He said, "As I understand it, this is my opportunity to say what I will to defend myself; and that largely upon what I say now depends my life."

The Presidor and the prosecutor both expressed their shock in ejaculations.

"Citizen," the Presidor protested, "your life is in no danger in the courts of the People's Democratic Dictatorship; we are amazed that such a misconception has been gained."

Mari Pos looked from Presidor to prosecutor, from video-technician to his defense specialist. "Undoubtedly I am under a misconception, indeed. It was my belief that if I were found guilty today that I would be declared a People's Safety Risk."

"Of course," the Presidor granted; "but *punishment* is a thing of the past. Prisons, correctional institutions, are as much a memory of the barbaric past of a hundred years ago as are electric

chairs and the hangman's noose."

"But do I understand correctly," Mari Pos pursued, "that a Safety Risk is automatically barred from employment by the People State?"

"That is correct, obviously."

"And that for all practical purposes there is no other employment?"

The Presidor pursed his lips. "I wouldn't be that sweeping, citizen."

"And that also following my being named a Safety Risk, any citizen associating with me—even, say, a waitress serving me in a restaurant—could be held accountable, be declared a Safety Risk in her turn?"

"A rather extreme example," The Presidor said, "but possible. I see no point in pursuing your line of reasoning; the answers are so obvious that no ten-year-old child but knows them."

"Ummm," the little man said. "That was my point. One more question. In this ultra-democratic state, in which all decisions are made by the people themselves, is any accounting made of how a citizen votes?"

The Presidor leaned forward, his forehead wrinkled. "Everyone knows that records are kept of the voting of each citizen."

"Then if one of the audience-jury voted in my behalf, he might well be brought to trial himself?"

The prosecutor was on his feet. "I demure," he snapped. "There is nothing in the prisoner's remarks to do with this case. He is criticising the People's Democratic Dictatorship which is the very reason he is on trial."

The Presidor nodded to the video-technician who took the vote. The screen went green and the Presidor said, "Sustained." He looked at the prisoner. "You will avoid these questions and summarize your defense."

The prisoner allowed himself a smile. He said, taking up a paper from the table before him, "I am accused of saying: *'The degree of true democracy to be found in any social system, is to*

be measured by the extent to which it protects its minorities—no matter how small, nor how obnoxious such minorities might be.’”

The prosecutor nodded, tight lipped, “Subversive,” he muttered.

“Very well,” the prisoner said. “I didn’t know that the park bench upon which I was seated, as I talked to a chance acquaintance, was wired and that a monitor was taking down my every word.”

“What,” the Presidor said impatiently, “is your defense?”

“I have none,” the prisoner said, and sat down.

There was a moment of surprise, a stunned look on the face of the defense specialist—all but anguish—as he leaned forward and whispered in a strained voice to his respondent.

The prosecutor was on his feet. “In view of this development, I demand an immediate vote. I will avoid myself a lengthy summation, but will point out that the respondent also spoke sneeringly against our sacred two party system, claiming that there was no difference between the Democratic People’s Party and the People’s Democratic Party—except that one was in and the other out—and that, consequently, we might as well have but one party. I claim subversion, and that the respondent must be named a People’s Safety Risk.”

The Presidor said, “The video-technician will now take a vote on the question, guilty or not guilty of subversion.”

The panel burned red.

The Presidor said, “The video-technician will now take a vote on the question of whether or not the respondent should be named a Safety Risk.”

The panel flashed green.

THE PRESIDOR turned to the prisoner. “Mari Pos,” he said, “come to your feet and face the court.”

The prisoner stood.

“Have you any cause to show why judgement should not now be pronounced against you according to the law?”

“Yes.”

There was silence in the court, and they looked at him. Even the forehead of the despairing defense specialist wrinkled in lack of understanding.

“I am not subject to your laws nor to your court,” the prisoner said.

The Presidor stared at him, flabbergasted.

“I am a citizen of another planet,” the respondent said. “You have no jurisdiction over me. In fact,” he added wryly, “quite to the contrary.”

The Presidor turned to the defense specialist. “Do I understand that the respondent wishes to plead insanity? Surely the counselor realizes that this is not the correct procedure.”

The defense specialist came to his feet. “Your honor,” he protested, “I know no more of this than you do yourself.”

Mari Pos said easily, “The method I utilized to reach the attention of the population of your entire planet had its amusing and interesting aspects; however, I will now come to the point.”

He took a paper from an inner pocket, and, while the others gaped at him, read for a short moment in a jargon of language unfamiliar to anyone present. When he was finished, he put it down and faced the Presidor. “I assume,” he said, his face twisting slightly, “that no one present understands Karonian, the official language of the Gabon League. Translated briefly, this document reveals to you that the Supreme Gabon has—for various reasons and considerations that need not enter into the matter at this level—bequeathed this solar system to the Grand Weira of the Satraphian Confederation.”

The Presidor opened and closed his mouth like an oxygen-starved goldfish.

Somehow, strangely, the little man

had seemed to gain in stature as his voice became brisk and businesslike. Almost, the others could believe him.

The Prosecutor stuttered, "Ridiculous. It is common knowledge that it has proven impossible to reach the other planets; space travel is impossible." He turned to the Presidor. "I respectfully suggest that sentence be passed, and the respondent be declared a People's Safety Risk."

Mari Pos smiled at him, almost fondly. He said, "My instructions have been to inform you of your change of status, and also to estimate your degree of development—so that the Satraphian Confederation can assimilate your planet on the level to which it is entitled."

In spite of himself, the Presidor was fascinated. "The level to which we are entitled?"

The other explained. "The Gabon League makes a policy of not revealing itself to the planets it possesses until they have reached a certain intellectual and cultural level. However, the *Confederation* operates under a different system with its member planets on four levels. The highest consists of the Satraphians themselves, and such life-forms as have achieved maturity. The second level consists of life forms that are on the verge of maturity, needing only time to achieve it. The third are life forms that are intelligent, but unable by nature to achieve true maturity. The fourth..." he hesitated.

"Ridiculous," the prosecutor snapped. "Your honor..."

"Silence," the Presidor said. "The man's insanity is at least original. The fourth..." he prompted.

"The fourth level," Mari Pos said, "is composed of life-forms capable of reaching maturity, as far as their natural abilities are concerned—but which have failed, through themselves, to so develop." He added softly, "I am afraid that they are utilized throughout the Confederation for drudgery."

The Presidor was taken aback. "And," he said, "to what category would you recommend we of this planet be relegated?" He winked slyly at the prosecutor and the video-technician.

Again the prisoner seemed to gain in stature. He said, "My dear sir, I am sure you know."

The Presidor suddenly lost patience. He barked, "You are named a People's Safety Risk. Begone from this court, and assume the position in society to which the People have banned you."

The slightest of smiles touched the corners of the little man's mouth. He looked at the strange timepiece on his wrist. "I must be gone, at any rate, he said. "I have other duties." He looked full into the screen. "Undoubtedly, the representatives of the Satraphian Confederation will be with you within a matter of a few days."

And then he disappeared.



SORRY!

Most editors run into trouble forgetting that type isn't made of rubber, and I'm no exception. So... Robert A. Madle's "Inside Science Fiction" was crowded out this time. But you'll find him in the July and September issues of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, and he'll be with us in the next issue of this magazine.

PS—Those of you who enjoy an occasional dip into sports, will find Bob giving forth in "Time Out", July TEN-STORY SPORTS.

PRIZE CONTEST RESULTS

IN THE February 1956 issue of this magazine, we ran an article entitled, "So Help Me", under the name of *Quien Sabe*? Since the author was a personality well known in science fiction, we thought it would make a good basis for a prize contest.

We asked you, the readers, four questions, which in their very nature offered clues to the identity of the author of "So Help Me?" The questions were as follows:

1. Who is "Quien Sabe?"
2. How did he first come to science fiction fans' attention?
3. With what well known pen-name was he associated?
4. What is his best-known story, published under his own name?

We offered a First Prize of \$25; a Second Prize of \$15, and five Third Prizes, of One Year's Subscription, or Extension, to our sister magazine, *Science Fiction Stories*, for the best letters received on the subject of "Quien Sabe". In order to qualify for a prize, the contestant had to answer the four questions correctly; letters were to be judged on the basis of accuracy and completeness of information offered in addition to the four questions.

We are happy to announce that Mr. Michael Fogaris, of 492 Lafayette Avenue, has won the First Prize.

We are less happy to announce that no one else qualified; no one else correctly deduced the identity of *Quien Sabe*.

Honestly, we did not imagine that the answer would be so difficult, especially when you consider the number of fans who were active during the period when "Quien Sabe" was best known.

Let us consider the clues contained in the questions.

First of all, questions 2, 3, and 4 state that *Quien Sabe* is a man.

Secondly, Question Number 2, "How did he first come to science fiction fans' attention?" suggests that he might not have been known, at first, as an author, although questions 3 and 4 state that he became known as an author.

Thirdly, Question Number 3, "With what

well-known pen-name was he associated?" suggests that he was a member of a writing team, whose work was published under a pen-name, which became well known.

Fourthly, the final question, "What is his best-known story, published under his own name?" suggests that *Quien Sabe* is well-known for stories under his own name, and that one of these is more widely known than any of the others. This, in turn, suggests that one particular story received a wider circulation than any of the others.

And, finally, the nature of the article, "So Help Me" suggests an author who is not only a writer, but who is, or was at one time, intimately connected with writers and magazines and their policies and problems.

Several contestants made wrong guesses, but showed such ingenuity in squaring these guesses with the questions that we're going to send them free copies of this issue, for consolation prizes.

Consolation prizes, and our admiration, therefore, go to:

Earl Kemp, 3508 North Sheffield Avenue, Chicago 13, Illinois, who picked James Blish as "Quien Sabe".

Bob Hoskins, Box 19, Lyons Falls, New York, who picked Cyril Kornbluth as "Quien Sabe".

Edward Wood, 1366 East 55th Street, Chicago 15, New York, who picked Wilson Tucker as "Quien Sabe".

John Butterworth, Jr., 37 Richmond Road, Belmont, Mass., who picked Henry Kuttner as "Quien Sabe".

Mr. Fogaris did not state whether he had followed the clues back to the identity of *Quien Sabe*, or whether he guessed first, and chose the answer which best squared in with the other three questions.

You'll find Mr. Fogaris' letter on page 98; want to think a bit, before turning to the letter, and see if you can figure out *Quien Sabe*'s identity before you read the answer?

So ends the Prize Contest. The questions, you see, were tricky, but not misleading. However, if we run another one, we'll pick a less difficult subject!

Just to prove that the keen eye of the critic and the razor edge of wit and satire are wonderful wherever they are combined, we present Michael Sherman's incisor bite into the work of a critic who is best known for his gnashing reviews.

— RANDALL GARRETT
(who did the pic)



DAMON KNIGHT'S "Hell's Pavement"

A REVIEW in VERSE
by MICHAEL SHERMAN

These parodies are perpetrated in the spirit of good fun, and no offence to either author or story is intended. In all cases, the author has seen the parody, and he's approved, between gusts of laughter.

*What is the horrid analogue
That inaugurates such woe,
And purloineth mankind of his soul,
As Knight herein doth show?*

The analogue appeareth as
An angel burning bright;
It halts the sinner in his path,
And turneth him to Right.

By alchemy I do not wot,
Whene'er fell thought doth reach the spot
Within the brain where rests the knot
The analogue hath tied,

Then shrinks the knave, in terror grave—
His Angel he hath spied.

*What is the form this angel takes,
When err would any man?
The image each himself doth form,
As Virtue's needs doth plan.*

He sees and hears and smells and feels
This pitiless visitant,
But no one else knows to what Shape
He doth for mercy pant;
We only know it comes, and then
To sin he finds he can't.

*What are the sins the analogue
Restrains one from committing?
All crimes of violence are barred;
Activities ill-fitting.*

The dignity and honor those
Who public office hold—
Corruption's in disruption, and
Ambition's blood is cold.

No more need spy the F. B. I.
Upon the sly suspect Red;
'Gainst overthrow, by analogue
Is government protected.

And what a man wants not to do,
Then never do shall he,
By angels barred—except for acts
That are compulsory.

*Why sure this is a goodly thing;
How could it work for ill?*
The Reverend Moorhead hath explained
That it destroys Free Will!
Attend Knight now; he doth relate
A tale thy blood to chill.

In 1990, all the great
Tycoons of Industry
Meet and devise a master plan,
To offer unto any man
Their goods for one year, free.

He need but take an analogue
Which will not let him buy
From any Company but one,
However he may try.

Thus Advertising ended is,
And since his every need
By one great firm each man's supplied,
Huge sales are guaranteed.
The Companies divide the world
Amongst them without greed.

*Ab, is it now the madcap blonde
And her reckless love appears?*
Of course not! We jump forty-four
Plus yet one hundred years.

*Some sort of lead this tale doth need;
What is the hero's place?*
We meet him now, amidst a row;
His name is Arthur Bass. *

He worketh for the Glenbrook Store,

Though in a low degree;
Yet raised above Consumer's rank
In sight of Great G. P.,
And witnesseth a Demon seize
A wretch for blasphemy.

*What, did the heedless mortal take
In vain our Dear Lord's name?*
Oh no, the knave had done far worse;
A holy Salesman he did curse,
And nearly died of shame.

Our hero ponders: "Angels none
Did hold this man in tether.
And am I better off than he?
I have no Angel, either.

"When, as a child, I was confirmed,
Like to his case, I wis,
In mire did bog a sacred cog,
And something went amiss."

Now comes a man named Laudermilk,
Archdeputy, and smooth as silk;
He giveth Bass a test.
But Arthur, ready for the blow,
Contrives to make a goodly show.

He sees a box of raisins; pressed
To lift his hand a reach for it,
He shrieks, and falleth in a fit—
These goods are *not* by G. P. blessed!

"Well done, my boy; we cannot say
Who gives a just reward, errs;
Art timber for the Sacred School—
Thou shalt take Holy Orders!"

Elated, Arthur tells his girl
About the situation.
"We'll wed," quoth he—"but why the
tears?"
She needs must marry, it appears,
A man of higher station.

"Farewell, my own," he sighs, and seeks
A sorrowful embrace;
She yieldeth first, then screams and flees,
And sirens fill the place.

What madness! He did seek to kiss
A maid he had not wed;
And now, a hunted outlaw, he
Doth fear he'll soon be dead!

* Mayhap I have misrhymed, alas;
Perhaps his name is Arthur Bass.

Up to the Wall 'round Glenbrook Town
He runs in dull despair;
Without, they tell, fell monsters dwell—
He leaps into their lair.

*And findeth here the madcap blonde?
Methinks I scent a twist
Within our author's cunning plot.
No blonde; I pray, desist*

These interruptions. Now we go
Unto a castle, grim,
Where villains dark his flight do mark,
And plan to capture him.

Anne Silver send they after Bass,
A damsel with a flair
For quick disguise that runneth from
Her toenails to her hair.

Amazed, young Arthur now beholds,
Cavorting in mad glee;
A crowd of nearly-naked folk
Engaged in some bewild'ring joke;
He very nearly has a stroke,
Bare female flesh to see.

Here U. M. is beneficent,
The G. P. sign obscene,
The speech abstruse, the morals loose;
Yet, running in between
The esoteric differences,
A sameness can be seen.

Amidst the murky mirth doth pass
A much-bewildered Arthur Bass, *
Without a single plan.
The female with whom he has tarried
Reveals serenely she is married—

A shocking thing! Young Arthur can
Not understand how this could be.
But in a shooting gallery,
He meets a girl named Anne.

The pair to a joy-palace go,
In sensual bliss to linger;
But when her clothes Anne doffs, he sees
A ring upon her finger.

Too much! Although not Angel-bound-
To Holy Virtue, chaste,
This girl's too bold; he knocks her cold,
Departing thence in haste.

Again alarms fill the night,

Ahead of him the Wall;
Around him, terror-stricken folk
In dread of Demons, all.

A raging fire he sets ablaze,
The barrier to defeat,
In hope that U. M. citizens
With G. P. men will meet. *

Just when it seemeth he is trapped,
There cometh from the sky
His Excellency, Lauder milk,
The great Archdeputy.

"Much mischief have you done, my boy
Though well thought-out your scheme;
It could but fail—for reasons that,
Untaught, you did not dream.

"For few are free, like you and me—
Exceptions to the rule—
Now that you know, you needs must go
Straight to the Sacred School."
(The villains meanwhile plot and plan,
And wonder on whose side is Anne.)

So Bass goes to the Sacred School,
A kind of Underground;
And here, in truth, he finds, forsooth
That mysteries abound;
Nor doth he feel its principles
Are altogether sound.

Meanwhile, sweet Anne—*Aha, at last!*
Now is the meaning clear;
Anne Silver is the madcap blonde!
Oh, cease thy drooling, drear!

There is no madcap blonde at all
Within this tale superb,
Save in the mind of whoever
Did write the jacket blurb!

A minor villain hath seized Anne,
She is in sorry shape;
To make it brief, she deals him grief
And maketh her escape.

Upon a secret mission sent,
Young Arthur now doth see
A matriarchal culture in
Angel society.
He fumbleth, fails—resistance spent,
And straight is to Disposal sent.

* This rhyme, of course, is out of place
Should our young hero's name be Bass.

And now the villains' dreadful plot
Begins to be revealed:
New analogues (remember?) are
Within some men concealed;
Into a world non-violent still,

They go, by Angels led, to kill.
Exiled within the fearful Blank,
From which none hath returned,
Bass findeth Anne, and realizeth
For her his heart has yearned.

Ah... Love and Will a way will find;
In short, the lovers find it;
They help unman the fiendish plan,
And into powder grind it.

Somewhere, full implication of
The analogue forgot is;
Though philosophical the tale,
Ingenuous the plot is—
I fear that Knight, in haste, hath strown
A bit of paving all his own.

Science Fiction Poetry?

(continued from page 26)

specific words and phrases far beyond any dictionary definitions of the terms employed; it is necessarily obscure in that what is clear to one reader will be meaningless to another, due to the other's lack of familiarity with various allusions and/or emotions associated with the allusions.

WHEN YOU have read "verse", and know what the author says, literally, you have extracted just about all the meaning that is to be had from the piece; when you have determined, through careful reading, what a poem literally says, you are ready to *begin* with "meanings". What is generally agreed upon as outstanding poetry consists of works wherein the overtones of what is there on the page *can* continue to vibrate in your consciousness, and bring forth "meanings" not visible to the eye. I underlined that word "can", because no one can positively predict what a given poem will say to *you* unless he knows you intimately—and not always then. The great works in poetry, however, are those which have proven to have achieved such effects upon large numbers of widely-varying people, over considerable lengths of time. Some people are insensitive to poetry, just as others are insensitive to music, painting, sculpture, etc.; many people respond to some poems, or poets, and not to others. The degree of one's sensitivity in this regard has little to do with intelligence, any more than color blindness results from low intelligence. Some people have high aptitudes for responding to poetry; others can learn; still others don't give a hang.

But one of the fundamentals is *comprehension*; and even in the poetry of former

years, where sometimes excessive lengths were employed to say little, those sections where the little was said were heavily compressed, heavily charged with multiple meaning—while the rest was poeticism and filling out forms.

On the other hand, one of the fundamentals in science fiction is *expansion*.

Science fiction must explain in detail, must make the meaning clear, where poetry is purposely ambiguous. As we have noted before, the "art" element of science fiction requires considerable ingenuity in the explanation and clarification, so that we do not have merely narrative essays on various theoretical extrapolations. But expansion is still the keynote. A plot, or story line, may be ambiguous—a character or characters likewise—but the science itself, or the extrapolations thereof, should not be so. And while a work of science fiction may contain several layers of meaning—worthwhile fiction usually does, anyway—the effects are not arrived at in the same way as they are in poetry.

Science fiction *contains* symbols; poetry deliberately *employs* them for the poet's particular purposes, although any poem may contain additional symbols of which the poet was not aware at the time. Admittedly, an author may use various of these elements in a work of prose, may use them deliberately and in a manner similar to that of a poet; however, this constitutes a special case, not generally found.

These are some of the reasons why we do not see science fiction poetry, and some of the reasons why I doubt that it can exist.

READIN' AND WRITHIN'

Book Reviews

by Damon Knight
and Randall
Garrett



THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS, by Edward J. Ruppelt. Doubleday, \$4.50.

If, like me, you have been bored or disgusted by previous saucer books, try this one.

Ruppelt is the former Air Force captain who, as head of Project Blue Book, was charged with investigating flying saucers from 1951 to 1953. In this big book, he tells the whole story of the UFO investigations, including the two that preceded his—Project Sign and Project Grudge.

The story of the investigation itself, never before told, is equally as fascinating as the UFO story embedded in it.

Ruppelt gives the impression of a man with a strong sense of fact and responsibility. One of the most attractive things about this book is the author's scrupulous avoidance of speculation about UFOs; he is trying to give you the facts, such as they are, and leave his opinions out of it. But behind the sober and responsible Ruppelt there is evidently a Ruppelt with a big grin—richly merited by the antics of the Air Force brass who (a) went overboard in 1947 for the view that UFOs are space-

ships; (b) made a 180° turn in 1949 and declared that all UFO sightings were mass hallucination; and (c) tried to end the problem by a publicity blackout—on the theory that if nobody mentioned them, the saucers would go away.

If this book adds up to any one conclusion, it is that the problem is not that simple. Project Blue Book and its predecessors have accumulated thousands of "good," i. e., credible and detailed, UFO reports—some 27 per cent of which, after the most rigid examination, cannot be checked off as sightings of known objects—planets, meteors, atmospheric illusions, balloons, etc. Included are radar sightings, and combined radar-visual sightings.

Not everybody who has studied UFOs thinks they are interplanetary. The report of the blue-ribbon scientific panel assembled in 1953 to evaluate UFO data said: *"We as a group do not believe that it is impossible for some other celestial body to be inhabited by intelligent creatures. Nor is it impossible that these creatures could have reached such a state of development that they could visit the earth. However, there is nothing in all of the so-called*

'flying saucer' reports that we have read that would indicate that this is taking place."

But people who have seen UFOs are nearly unanimous on one point: what they saw was something real.

Whatever they are, UFOs appear to have six things in common: brilliant appearance (white or metallic by day, bright lights by night); oval or spherical shape; completely silent operation; high speed; unapproachability; and erratic motion (many reports mention the UFOs' "violent oscillation"):

How much of this pattern is really useful in speculating about the nature of the UFOs, it's hard to say. The trouble is that there is still no hard evidence—nothing but the reports of observers, and a few instrument recordings of doubtful interpretation. The incident of the Florida scout-master, who claimed to have been knocked out by a ball of fire from a landed saucer, has puzzling aspects; but probably most readers will agree with Ruppelt in classifying it reluctantly among the hoaxes: vivid as it is, the report simply does not have the feel of the bona fide UFO sightings.

Spaceships or not, why do the UFOs concentrate over "interesting" military and civil installations, rather than averaging out according to population density? Why is there an annual peak in UFO sightings in July, and another in December?

The investigation is still going on. We are not done with the saucers yet.

THIS FORTRESS WORLD, by James Gunn (Gnome, \$3.00) is the author's second novel; like his first, "Star Bridge" (with Jack Williamson), it is full of good—or at least acceptable—fictional ideas, slowly and ineptly developed. Its basic framework is all too familiar: acolyte rebels against priestly tyranny founded on electronic "miracles"; helps overthrow same; meets girl; gets girl.

In this kind of thing, once you get your shmo-hero out of his comfortable cell in the monastery, the plot cannot proceed until you have him meet somebody who can teach him the ropes—and, as a matter of course, enroll him as an Underground member. In Leiber's "Gather, Darkness!" this person was Mother Jujy—a likeable crone, whose adoption of Brother Jarles was at least half-believable; in Heinlein's "If This

Goes On—" it was Zebadiah, a fellow member of the Prophet's palace guard. This is the most plausible solution, and is at the opposite pole from two things that happen to Gunn's hero, William Dane: he is dragged in off the street by a professional killer, who educates him in the tricks of the trade (enabling Dane to kill him, one chapter later on), and subsequently, he Meets a Girl in a Bar.

Once off on this wrong foot, the story limps over after; much of the action fails to advance the plot, and nearly all of it is unconvincing. Two minor characters—the villains Sabatini and Siller—are briefly and unexpectedly vivid, and there are frequent touches elsewhere of the good writing we expect from the author of "The Misogynist" and "New Blood"; but not even the best of artistic second thoughts can save this commercially degraded story.

The book has one more thing seriously wrong with it, in common with other recent popular work: Spillanism—sadistic violence for its own sake. We have grown so used to this in our country, that it comes as a shock when a European reader protests with honest revulsion. When that happened to me, some time ago, I argued with my correspondent somewhat in this vein: "Violence exists, even sadistic violence, and is a factual part of the universe about which we write stories. Where do you draw the line between what is permissible to write about, and what isn't?" I couldn't think of any satisfactory answer, then; but believe I know one now. The question is one of meaning.

The abortive first novel I started, when I was 19, was autobiographical; I wrote in the third person and changed all the names, but otherwise it might as well have been a diary. To my surprise and disappointment, this did not turn out to be a novel, or to have any other virtues; I dropped it after the first few pages.

Probably most young writers have to go through this sobering experience; my point is that *reality alone* does not justify putting *anything* into a story: fiction is reality plus *meaning*. At 19, I had no understanding of my own life and had nothing to say about it; my "novel" was only a transcription. The author of "This Fortress World," for whatever reason, has not said anything about evil; he has simply mortared in a chunk of the pure thing.

The reader will have to turn to an older work, C. S. Lewis's "Perelandra" trilogy, to find the moral: "evil" and "meaning" are opposite terms.

MARTIANS, GO HOME, by Fredric Brown. Dutton, \$2.75.

Fredric Brown, who inhabits an imaginary city called "Tuscon, Arizona," has here conjured up the most unpleasantly real set of Martians since "The War of the Worlds." These Martians, impalpable little green men, descend on the Earth on the morning of March 26, 1964, in sufficient numbers to furnish one Martian for every three human beings. They thrive on dissension and apoplectic anger; have X-ray eyes; are insatiably curious about everything, and they will not go away. Not when you are holding a straight to the ace, king. Not when you want to climb under the blankets with your wife. Not nohow.

Brown plays this comic situation for all it is worth and a trifle more. As in many of his longer works (expanded, like this one, from short novels), the narrative is toughly woven, but thin; under a less agile performer than Brown, it would undoubtedly collapse.

That Brown can spin the joke out to these dimensions, and make you like it, is perhaps partly due to his calculated impudence (instead of solving the Martian problem, he suggests three possible—and mutually exclusive—answers, and leaves you to decide), and partly to his interest in people and places that world-saving writers usually skip: bums in barrooms, janitors in basements, ordinary joes in ordinary hotels.

The new version of this story is considerably bawdier than the one which appeared in *Astounding*; if this moves you—or if you simply want to spend an afternoon with a grin on your face—go to it. Serious, constructive science fiction readers, stay away.

THE GIRLS FROM PLANET 3, by Richard Wilson. Ballantine, 35¢.

Dick Wilson, now a large, amiable, crag-jawed staff man for Reuter's, is the eighth novelist to come out of the prewar bickering association known as the Futurian Society of New York.* The most even-tem-

pered and unmalicious of the Futurians, Wilson has written an easy-going, pleasant and barbless novel. All the people in the book—newspapermen, pretty girls, Texas cowboys, even the aluminumbra'd invaders from Planet Five, System Seven—are likable and good-natured, the kind of folks you would like to invite into your living room.

This makes for a relaxed atmosphere, like that of a good quiet movie seen through a haze of soma, but it does cut down on the suspense. Even when mysterious, metallic monsters are rampaging across the countryside—clanking and emitting smoke in an almost too George-Palish fashion—there is a definite feeling that everything will come out all right, over a couple of mildly-alcoholic drinks in some tasteful and quiet bar.

This, indeed, is what happens; but in between, there is a pleasant skirmish in the war between the sexes; a two-women-one-man plot that is neither nauseatingly routine nor superficial—can't remember ever seeing one of *those* before—one or two brilliant bits of extrapolation, and a lot of low-key high jinks. The whole thing is good fun, and would make a first-rate bad movie.

LORD OF THE FLIES, by William Golding (Coward-McCann, \$3.50)

is not science fiction nor even fantasy as the terms are usually understood, but I would like to break a rule and review it here anyhow: it is so close to the field—and so remarkable a book—that I think fantasy readers will want to know more about it.

When the story begins, thirty or forty British schoolboys have somehow been unexpectedly set down on a deserted tropical island. Evidently a new war had started, and the boys were being flown out of danger: the plane was attacked, and the passengers dropped in a sort of detachable cabin. To this extent, I suppose the book is science fiction—but that is as far as it goes; Golding's intention is to show you what happens to the boys after they get on the island, and it does not much matter how.

Particularly in the opening chapters, the book comes triumphantly alive. Golding's

* The others: Wollheim, Kornbluth, Pohl, Lowndes, Blish, Merril and me.

island has all the rock-solid vividness of Stevenson's or Defoe's: you can see the pure sunlight filtering through the leaves, hear the insects, feel the dry sand underfoot. Golding, an ex-Navy man turned schoolmaster, knows tropical islands—and boys, as well. The half-dozen boys who occupy the foreground are absolutely believable—recognizable individuals, not stereotypes, genus *boy*—and the rest form a silent chorus in its own way equally convincing:

Some were naked and carrying their clothes; others half-naked, or more or less dressed, in school uniforms, grey, blue, fawn, jacketed or jerseyed. There were badges, mottoes even, stripes, of color in stockings and pullovers. Their heads clustered above the trunks in the green shade; heads brown, fair, black, chestnut, sandy, mouse-colored; heads muttering, whispering, heads full of eyes that watched...and speculated.

These opening chapters are like a boyish dream come true: a desert island, and no grownups. The most poignantly moving passages of the book occur in this time, when the boys are busy discovering their island and themselves: "that glamor, that strange invisible light of friendship, adventure and content."

But there is a Beast on the island. The littluns dream about it, and wake up shrieking; the hunters sense it behind them in the forest. Never seen, it haunts them by its presence; and little by little, the dream turns into a nightmare.

Golding's point: Civilization is a hard-built thing that only grownups know; children are nearer to savagery, and the Beast.

Children need meat, and there are pigs on the island—but no butchers. Someone has to hunt and kill; someone has to be the first to stand over the prey, with his arms reeking red to the elbows.

Someone has to paint his face with clays, and learn to chant over the fallen enemy:

"Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Bash her in."

Like a chart slowly unrolling the wrong way, the boys' society moves back along a familiar path to the tribe, and the law of blood. Golding's grip seems to falter once or twice; there are spots here of confusion and even of falsity. The personification of the Beast in a dead airman who comes to

rest at the top of the island—though it provides one moment of pure horror—is forced, and becomes a nuisance to the plot; but the subsequent appearance of the Beast to the epileptic Simon, in the form of a dead pig's head, is viscerally right, hypnotically compelling.

And the retrograde movement of the story as a whole is so strong that everything seems inevitable, down to the moment when the hunters move across the island, painted and fierce in the pre-Columbian sunlight—stalking a two-legged prey.

THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY, by Morey Bernstein. Doubleday, \$3.75.

Morey Bernstein is a young family-business executive of Pueblo, Colorado, whose hobby is therapeutic hypnosis. In 1952, he tried taking a subject in deep trance back beyond her own birth, into a previous life. The results made this book—that is, about half of it. Thirty pages are taken up by appendices—supplementary material about hypnosis—and the actual record of the experiment does not begin until page 106: until that point, the book is concerned with Bernstein himself, and the steps by which he became interested in hypnosis, ESP and reincarnation.

During the original session, and on five subsequent occasions, the subject assumed the personality of one Bridey Murphy, born in Cork, Ireland, in 1798, deceased in Belfast in 1864.

The question is, was there a Bridey Murphy?

Due to the paucity of records (and to Bernstein's inept questioning), this question can probably never be answered; and it will only irritate many people that it should have been asked at all. Since the subject also described her death and burial as Bridey Murphy, and her sojourn in an immaterial world before being reborn in her present body, the question is of some interest.

Between the discontinuance of the experiment and the hurried publication of this book, some superficial investigations were made by correspondence in Ireland. So far, one of the items which have been checked out in this way is astonishing, and several others are suggestive—but there is no solid evidence.

This leaves us the transcripts themselves, and they are just the same: suggestive in many places, astonishing once or twice, but never proving anything. The author, who in places sounds like a prize jork, has not done justice to this subject, nor have the publishers. The question remains open; all we can hope is that it may perhaps be a little more open than it was.

Noted

REPORT ON THE STATUS QUO, by Terence Roberts. Merlin, \$2.50. The author (an all-around Errol Flynn type, as described by his publishers) is long on geology and paleontology, but short on narrative technique. This overpriced little book—about the re-emergence of the dinosaurs in the year 1958—is written in a resolutely archaic and bead-fringed style, as dusty as an old lampshade. It manages to crowd its earth-shaking plot into 63 pages by holding it at arm's length, in the bad-history-book, or "Of course you are all familiar with the events of . . ." style.

CAVIAR, by Theodore Sturgeon. Ballantine, 35¢. A mixed bag again, mostly pot-boilers from the '40s *Astonishing and Unknown*. There are two new stories, both abrim with the author's exuberant virtues and excesses—"Twink" and "Bright Segment."

TALES OF CONAN, by Robert E. Howard and L. Sprague de Camp. Gnome, \$3.00. These are stories that, as de Camp explains, Howard originally wrote as "tales of oriental adventure with medieval and modern settings." De Camp, in this posthumous collaboration, has changed them all to Conan stories—a thing that Howard himself might have done, had he lived. All the same, since this means that de Camp's one-fifth of the writing includes all the Conan there is in this volume, the result is not satisfactory to me: but readers should note that I am no Howard fan.

(Note: What seems to be an error in P. Schuyler Miller's introduction—a name!—that the first Conan story was "The Tower of the Elephant", appearing in the March 1933 issue of *Weird Tales*—can be justified on the grounds that Conan is younger,

chronologically, in this story than in any of the others. However, the statement may give a misimpression which needs correcting: Two Conan stories, both dealing with events nearer the end of his recorded career, appeared before "The Tower of the Elephant". Conan made his debut to readers of *Weird Tales*—including Mr. Miller, I'll wager—with "The Phoenix on the Sword" December, 1932; and its sequel, "The Scarlet Citadel", January, 1933. RWL)

STAR SHINE, by Fredric Brown. Bantam, 25¢. This is Brown's short story collection, published by Dutton as "Angels and Spaceships," and well worth the price for the classic "The Yehudi Principle" alone.

THE FIFTY-MINUTE HOUR, by Robert Lindner. Bantam, 35¢. This book contains the now-famous episode involving the government scientist who thought he was living the life of a science-fiction hero: some will be interested to note that it is even more complete and irreverent than the *Magazine of Fantasy* reprinting, which filled in some of the lacunae in the *Harper's* version. The other four psychoanalytic tales—about a sex criminal, a Communist, a Fascist, and a compulsive eater—are equally fascinating, and for some reason, twice as believable.

THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, by Sir George Thomson. Cambridge University Press (New York), \$2.50. This peep at tomorrow is uncommonly sober and thorough, but by no means staid. Discussing future sources of food, the author remarks, "It ought to be possible to allow much of England to return to parkland and to let the downs go back to grass. Large herds of cattle, fed mostly on synthetic foods [by automatic machines] and unused to man, will roam through the trees as they did long ago. Is it too much to hope that hunting with the bow and arrow will revive as a means of procuring food from these herds and supplying the chemical engineers who made the fodder with a spice of adventure?"

—Damon Knight

Double Star by Robert A. Heinlein,
Doubleday, \$2.95.

SOME YEARS ago, in an excellent little symposium called *of Worlds Beyond* (Fantasy Press), Robert Heinlein discussed the various plot-forms of fiction. His literary distillations produced a sort of triadic quintessence. There are, he said, only three basic plot forms: "boy-meets-girl", "the man who learned better", and "the Little Tailor."

The subject matter of the first is obvious. The second concerns the character who begins the story with one viewpoint and by the time the story ends has re-evaluated himself and switched viewpoints. The third comes from the folk-tale of the same name; it's the story of the Little Nobody who becomes a Big Somebody.

Heinlein's contention was—and presumably still is—that every story can be boiled down to one of those plots. It was inevitable, then, that Heinlein would eventually write all three plots up in one book. "Double Star" is the result.

This is Heinlein's first truly adult novel since "The Puppet Masters", and his best one since "Beyond This Horizon." It concerns the adventures of one Lawrence Smith (alias Lorenzo Smythe; alias The Great Lorenzo), an egotistical, self-styled genius who, in spite of his admitted ability as an actor, is unemployed. He is hired, *sub rosa*, to impersonate John J. Bonforte, political head of the Expansionist Party, leader of the Loyal Opposition, and former Supreme Minister of the Solar Empire. The Empire, it seems, is run on the same pattern as the nineteenth century British Empire—a not unworkable method—and is reigned over by the Emperor, Willem of Orange, King of the Netherlands, and ruled by the acknowledged head of whatever Party happens to be in the saddle at the time. (How the Royal Family of Holland got to be Emperors of the Solar System, Mr. H. neglects to tell us, so never *you* mind!)

There are two main parties, as there should be in a two party system: the Humanists and the Expansionists. The Humanists are a bunch of Manifest Destiny boys who think that human beings ought to rule the Universe, while the Expansionist group wants every intelligent race to have equal rights.

Just as Bonforte is about to be made an Honorary Martian, he is kidnapped by the Humanists. Bonforte's loyal aides have to hire a double to go through with the ceremony, and that brings us back to our protagonist, Lorenzo.

As in "The Puppet Masters", the story is told in the first person. But unlike the former, there is justification here. "Double Star" is not a private-eye, Mike Hammer sort of thing. Lorenzo, conceited though he may be, takes his acting seriously. He doesn't believe in Bonforte's politics, but he does the job anyway, and does it well. Too well, in fact; he out-Bonforte's Bonforte, and comes to believe in Expansionist theories. (The man who learned better)

He also falls in love with Bonforte's secretary (boy-meets-girl), and is forced to be a big-shot politician, instead of a two-bit actor (the Little Tailor).

After Bonforte's rescue from the villains, he is still too ill to do his duties, so Lorenzo has to go on with the impersonation, and thus the plot evolves, getting our hero in deeper and deeper.

While the story is exciting and well-written, I think it is the philosophy behind it rather than the story itself which is important.

Human beings are funny people; they don't function properly out of their depth. Psychologists have long known that a man who is fitted to be, say, a chemist won't make a good bookkeeper, and *vice versa*. That's common knowledge. But let's look at another phase of it.

The time Honored American Way of getting to be a big-shot is to start at the bottom and work your way up. The theory is that if you've Got What It Takes, you will always Go To The Top. It sounds fine, and it's an excellent bit of propaganda for the average man. "You'll start in at \$50 a week," says the boss, "but there's plenty of opportunity for advancement." Hah! I know better, and so do you. But even if it's true, look at all the years of creative ability that poor guy is losing in order to get into a position to use it.

If you put a mediocre mind into a position where he *must* exercise creative ability, you will have a failure: Note Calvin Coolidge and Warren G. Harding. On the other hand, if you take a brilliant mind and force it into a mediocre mold, you can break it. Abraham Lincoln almost fell into that

category, and his thinking was undoubtedly hurt by long years of being nobody. Of course, it's difficult to point to examples of this kind; most of them never make a mark in history to be pointed at. They just crack, fall apart, and are lost forever. Others crack before they get to the top, and become Hitlers and Stalins.

Some men have to *start* at the top—and go on from there.

And that's the story of Lorenzo Smythe.

It's a shame that Mr. Heinlein didn't take the time to polish the novel as it deserved. There are rough spots in it that could easily have been smoothed out, and there are glaring errors that the editor should have blue-pencilled, even if Heinlein didn't.

On page 20, Lorenzo is in a room in the Eisenhower Hotel "*I went on buffing my nails...*"

On page 30: "...*fortunately, a gentleman always wears gloves, and I had had mine off only to put on makeup...*"

He doesn't put on makeup until page 23.

Now, I submit that buffing one's nails with gloves on, while not impossible, is at least inefficient, and looks rather foolish.

Also, on page 28, Lorenzo uses a Martian life wand (a kind of ray gun, one assumes) with the greatest of efficiency to cup up a corpse in the bathtub.

On pages 89-90, he makes it quite plain that he's not even sure what makes a life wand go off, nor what it does when the trigger is pressed. He again demonstrates his ignorance of life wands on page 132.

Nevertheless, the book still has the smooth Heinlein touch: the easy description, the clever, natural dialogue, the witty phraseology. Some of Heinlein's similes are delicious:

"—*as poor in vitamins as a mother-in-law's kiss.*"

The background can only be called convincing. All the little details that make you feel that this time and place must exist—somewhere, somewhen—and that you are there. In telling the story of his adventure, Lorenzo makes you, the reader, feel as though you're living in *his* age, not your own. He assumes you know all about his civilization and the mores thereof; he's simply trying to tell you how he reacted to the environment around him. Things the average person might not know—like what a "Farleyfile" is—are explained, because Lorenzo didn't know what they were, either. But what is an "oubliette"? The dictionary doesn't help you especially, and Lorenzo assumes you know. And, by golly, when he gets through using one, you *do* know! This is the hand of the master craftsman in science-fiction; the ability to explain without seeming to explain.

"Double Star" is not a part of Heinlein's *Future History* series, but it reads like a historical novel—a history that hasn't happened yet.

Thus, in spite of its occasional flaws, I not only found it worth reading, but worth re-reading. I will probably re-read it again. Go thou and do likewise.

—Randall Garrett



A Powerful Novel of The Hunted

RUN, LITTLE MEN!

by Eric Frank Russell

Leads off the June

F A M O U S

DETECTIVE STORIES

*If your newsdealer is sold out, send 25¢ to Columbia Publications, Inc.
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A Department of Letters and Comment

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Well, at last you've done it! For years, the fcn have been hollering about the pulp paper in magazines, just as they used to scream for trimmed edges. And now, with the May *Science Fiction Quarterly*, we have the world's first non-pulp pulp. The same number of pages, but it takes up less room in the collection shelves. The pictures come out neater and cleaner, and the type is easier to read. Keep up the good work, and for Heaven's sake, don't go digest size on us. As it is, SFQ has more individuality than any other magazine in the field.

"No Future in This" takes top honors for the issue. When I first read it, I wondered that a new author could write such a convincing story, but then I read Madle's column, and the whole thing was explained. "Robert Randall" will, I hope, appear more often. Tell the firm of Garrett & Silverberg to get busy.

Second place goes to Abernathy's "One of Them". Did it ever occur to anyone that the only way an "android" of this type could be distinguished from a "real" human would be to check up on their birth certificates? And if a couple of sympathetic humans went into the forging business...

"The Piece Thing" by Carol Emshwiller (Any relation to Ed Emshwiller?) was one

of those spooky little mood pieces that are so rarely well done. Most of them leave you wishing the author hadn't bothered. This one didn't; I like it.

"The Man Who Left Paradise" was clever, and rather fun to read, but, frankly, I didn't see much point to it. It left me with a definite "so what?" feeling.

"The Munk Hour" left me cold. It's the same old story about the poor, misunderstood alien who finds a sympathetic human, who *naturally* is a science-fiction author. (Science fiction authors are *always* kind, understanding, imaginative, and brilliant—especially in science fiction stories.) And, naturally, with the brilliant mind of the alien, plus the brilliant mind of the hero, the whole thing ends up with everyone fabulously rich and happy, and the awful villains who exploit the poor aliens get their Just Deserts. *Ecch!*

How about a story where a very ugly, monstrous alien convinces some poor dupe of a science fiction author that Martians are really nice people? In the end, the Martians take over, and the author gets knocked off, cursing himself for his gullibility with his dying breath. Now, *there's* a story...

Cox's "The Big Hush" was even worse, in its own way. It starts out as though it

[Turn To Page 82]

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were going someplace, and ends up with one of the silliest resolutions I've ever seen. The Loyal but Stupid Soldier saves everything the last minute by pointing a rifle and saying, in effect: "I have the upper hand now, so all will go well. Because of a Sudden Revelation, I am no longer Loyal but Stupid; I am Disloyal and Smart!"

Does Mr. Cox think that someone pointing a gun at the President of the United States and forcing him to admit, publicly, that there was no such thing as the atomic bomb or the communist menace would cause a wholesale revolution in the U. S.? That's what I call sloppy thinking. The whole story idea and its execution comes from the Middle Ages of science fiction, when revolutions against the Evil Rulers were always hatched by three or four people, and the whole thing was carried off by kidnapping the Emperor. At that point, the Emperor gives up, and the Good People are happy. Did the U. S. Government collapse when Lincoln, Garfield, or McKinley were shot? Of course not. And when nasty old Stalin died, the rest of the boys carried on without a hitch.

Sorry, Mr. Cox, but you just don't throw over governments that easily. Try again, and next time, think it through.

De Camp's book reviews were good, but I missed the caustic vivisection of Damon Knight. Another thing I missed was the "Parodies Tossed" section.

I liked the editorial very much. It gives us readers a picture of what an editor goes through in trying to pick stories we'll enjoy. I can see it isn't the easy job that some people think it is.

RAYMOND PETRI, Brooklyn, N.Y.

There's no doubt the paper used in the May issue gives cleaner reproduction than pulp paper, but another aspect of it may not be so good. The magazine looks a good deal thinner, and this might affect the sales adversely. Whether anything so unfortunate will happen, there's no way of telling for many months. The May issue went on sale around March first, and came off sale around the middle of May. We won't have complete figures on it much before July, by which time the issue you are reading (August) should have been on sale for a little better than a month. So, if you see the old pulp paper in the present issue, that doesn't necessarily mean that we are

not sticking with the paper used in the May issue, but that we want to check the sales angle carefully before a final decision is made.

Perhaps Mr. Cox will be of a mind to defend his thesis in "The Big Hush"; if he writes in, you'll see his reply.

PENITENT

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I recently purchased the February issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*, the first in a long time for me, and since you seem to appreciate letters from the readers, "Here I Am!"

I noticed that in this issue there was some discussion in the readers section about the covers, most of which I agree with. However, I might as well put in my three cents worth. (Everything has gone up, these days.)

As far as what type of cover is desirable to advance the circulation of your magazine is concerned, I feel that, since the reader who has read the magazine before—and intends to read it again—will probably do so regardless of the cover, then those persons who have never, or seldom, read the magazine are the ones we must be concerned with.

Now let's just consider exactly how a person goes about deciding if he would rather read this magazine or that magazine. For an example, let's take me, since I egotistically assume that I'm a normal SF reader.

When I first walk up to the newsstand, I locate *all* the SF mags there. This indicates that the titles should be large and/or eye-catching.

Secondly, I look at the covers, and choose one for closer inspection. Here's the big point. Personally, I feel that the cover should contain a glimpse at a scene, or plot, of something within. For example; I like robots and "Esper" stories. So if a cover depicts a robot battling with an "Esper" then I'll grab up the mag and search the table of contents for the story about the scene depicted on the cover. Now perhaps I didn't read the February issue very well (only, considering the stories, I figure I did pretty well. However...) but I couldn't form any connection between the cover and the stories within. It's fine re-

[Turn To Page 84]

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verse psychology but not very practical in the long run, eh?

Next, the interior pictures, of which you have quite a few, should also pertain to that which is within, this time the story. The illustrations before the stories are fine. It's those little chapter headers that gripe me. Suppose the guy (the prospective buyer) picks up the mag and thumbs through looking at the illustrations, believing that they show glimpses of the stories therein, then gets home and settled down to read about the bombing of earth, or the "Third Galactic Space-War" and finds himself confronted by stories of the "Tweedlets" (Small, cuddly, fun-loving teddy-bears from outer Ighillache that radiate love and affection, and contaminate all those around them with these same emotions). It would be a frustrating, if not irritating, experience, no? Agreed, the in-stock fillers are cheaper, but not nearly so effective.

As long as I've shot off my mouth this much (more than I'd intended, believe me) I might as well give my views on the rest of the issue.

"Think No Evil", by Harry Warner, Jr: Average, interesting SF; nothing special.

"Why Should I Stop?", by Algis Budrys: Unique, interesting style made potentially-dull story interesting. Good.

"Honor", by Richard Wilson: Very Good story with a moral. I liked.

"Elected", by George Hudson Smith: Cute twist, but nothing special. Average.

"Love Me Again", by Carol Emshwiller: Also cute, with a twist, but only average. Incidentally, is the first four letters of her, the author's, last name in any way related to those used by the famed SF illustrator, Emsh?

"So Help Me", by Quien Sabe: The best in the mag. And I agree with his report wholeheartedly.

"Cash Prize Content": Got me stumped.

"Parodies Tossed", by Randall Garrett: Very good. My wife never read "Slan", but I've given her the "Preparatory Garrett Course". She also agrees: Very Good.

Summary: Why don't you close up shop and just write the damn stuff yourselves. It seems to be better than the stuff you're getting in from the others. I'll buy the next issue to make a comparison against this one. Perhaps you've hit a fluke "sour pickle". Perhaps, that one, though, will be the last for a while. I'll check in once in a while though, so do not despair.

I hope you don't really mind these comments as I meant them only in the hope that my opinions might help you arrive at—

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CHARLES BLAINE,
Sacramento, California

P.S. EEE! I boo-boomed, but *good!* Now, of all times, I notice the italicised notation on the title page, "*Cover by Frank Kelly Freas, suggested by a scene in 'Why Should I Stop?'*". Natch; now I can see the connection I spoke of earlier, and in reality it's a good cover. I would enclose a photo of myself at this minute, down on my hands and knees pleading for forgiveness; but I don't have a camera. Perhaps if I promised to buy the next year's every issue...? Of course the logical thing to do would be to just not send this letter. But I hate to work so laboriously over the typewriter and then throw the thing in the wastebasket. So I'll send it anyhow. And besides, as my wife says, it's good practice for me. Anyhow, you've got one reader for the next year that you're sure of. And I promise to live by

this penance faithfully, just to teach myself to not go around shooting off my big mouth.

Hmm, yes—perhaps it is time to retire the little chapter headings. If they haven't gone from the issue in which this letter appears, rest assured they'll be gone from the following issue. You aren't the first to have made this suggestion...

Carol Emswiller is, as you guessed, Mrs. Ed Emswiller. And my guess is that you'll be seeing more of her work.

Purchasing SFQ as a penance? Surely, you jest!

IN THE GROOVE

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

To open this letter on a rather trite note, it looks as if *Science Fiction Quarterly* is back in the groove once more. Kenn Curtis ("It Says Here", May issue) was pretty disgusted with your February number, and I'm afraid that I was in general agreement with him. However, I suppose you're al-

[Turn To Page 88]

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lowed one flop per year; the May issue
is so much better that it is almost enough
to make one forget its predecessor.

The Bob Silverberg-Randall Garrett team
(Robert Randall) looks like a really great
one, because both of these boys are loaded
with talent and both have a background in
their chosen field of literary endeavor. "No
Future In This" is the first story I've seen
under their joint authorship so far, but if
one can take this novelet as a sample of
what is to come, well...look out, Msrs.
Pratt and deCamp!

"One Of Them" places second, although
the theme is not new. Abernathy has a way
with words, however, and manages to con-
vey the mood and picture of his characters
in a highly skillful manner. Same goes for
"The Big Hush", by Irving Cox, but the
mood isn't as prevalent here, because of the
length of the story. Give it third.

Russ Winterbotham, an oldtimer who is
beginning to write once more in quantity,
comes up with an interesting bit of sugar-
coated philosophy in "The Man Who Left
Paradise". It's rather hard for us to imagine
a world without crime, sin, war, and dis-
honesty, but this only proves Russ' point,
and starts you to thinking all the more.

I'll have to admit it...frankly, I got
nothing out of the piece thing in Carol
Emshwiller's story of the same name. I re-
alize that there must be something to it, or
it wouldn't have been accepted, so I place it
fifth, because I didn't care for "The Monk
Hour" at all. Last position for Basil Wells.

This cover...well, studying it for a few
seconds shows one that it certainly is no
Emsh masterpiece, but it does have an in-
triguing effect at first glance, and should
attract a goodly number of quarters for
you. Which; I am sure, is the primary re-
sult desired. Don't you think you're going a
little overboard on this business white back-
grounds, though? The first time one was
used (on the September '55 *Science Fiction
Stories*) a few fans said they liked it, and
since that time we've gotten nothing but
the same damned thing! I don't mind them
once in a while, but every issue of both SFS
and SFQ is way too often. You've got the
logo proportionate to the rest of the cover,
though; that's cause for rejoicing.

And Ghusake, wha' happen to damon
knight? Has he forsaken good ole Colum-

[Turn To Page 90]

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Compression Readings—1945 Dodge Truck

	Cylinder 1	Cylinder 2	Cylinder 3	Cylinder 4	Cylinder 5	Cylinder 6
Before	67 lbs.	75 lbs.	75 lbs.	75 lbs.	75 lbs.	85 lbs.
After	100 lbs.	110 lbs.	115 lbs.	105 lbs.	105 lbs.	115 lbs.

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Compression Readings—1948 Pontiac

	Cyl. 1	Cyl. 2	Cyl. 3	Cyl. 4	Cyl. 5	Cyl. 6	Cyl. 7	Cyl. 8
Before	105 lbs.	95 lbs.	107 lbs.	120 lbs.	118 lbs.	115 lbs.	95 lbs.	123 lbs.
After	123 lbs.	120 lbs.	120 lbs.	125 lbs.	122 lbs.	120 lbs.	115 lbs.	116 lbs.

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

bia for Larry Shaw and *Infinity*? I like de Camp well enough, but his mythological interests inspire him to review books that most of we readers do not ordinarily flock to, thus causing him to skip many that we do like (such as the new novels).

"Editor's Choice": (funny; when I first read that title, I thought you were going to talk about the Sam Moskowitz book). Yes, I too like discussions on editorial problems, and this business of your tastes against what you think your readers like is no doubt one of your biggest. There's not much you can do about it, however, except keep trying to glean reader likes and dislikes from the letters that come in, and keep an open mind when reading manuscripts.

Y'know, SFQ may uphold the glorious tradition of pulps yet! Keep plugging!

KENT MOOMAW, Cincinnati, Ohio

No, Damon Knight has not deserted us; it just happens that, from time to time, either the book review section will be crowded out, or Damon will not have had the time to get it in before deadline. De Camp specializes in the type of books he reviews for us; we are glad to have them, since Knight usually isn't interested in this type of offering, and doesn't pretend to have the background that Sprague has on the subject.

The approval by way of letters certainly plays a part in the cover-background policy, but sales figures have a great deal more to do with it. We don't intend to have white backgrounds every time, but they will be frequent.

NO FLASH IN THE PAN

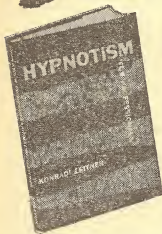
Dear Mr. Lowndes:

While I nearly always find the letter departments in magazines of interest, I must confess that I rarely feel the urge to write in to them. Something must be especially good, or particularly irritating, to give me such an urge, and for the most part few stories move me that much. Some I enjoy, and some I don't care for; but on the whole, I follow a few of the magazines—yours included—and let other readers carry the ball when it comes to letter writing.

Well, to end the suspense, I'll say that it was something I thought unusually good which elicited this letter, and I refer to your lead story in this May issue, "No Future in

[Turn To Page 92]

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Full-page photographs and a glossary of terms.

LOS ANGELES EXAMINER

Bravely done explanation of techniques of stage and therapeutic hypnotism by a practitioner of the former. Has valuable bibliography.

JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY. Clear and interesting.

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

'This', by Robert Randall. I have never seen this author before, but if this story is not merely a flash in the pan, I expect to see him more than once again!

Both the characterization of Father Riley and the role that he and the Church play in this story struck me as being particularly well done. These elements turn up very seldom in science fiction, and truth to tell I would rather see them omitted than handled badly—that is, dragged in by the hair to underline a moral, or preach a sermon, and so forth. Still, if we are going to have believable portrayals of the possible future, then surely every aspect of our lives should be considered; insofar as they are legitimate material for fiction.

That is, any aspects of reality which are not considered unworthy of fictional consideration in mainstream literature should not be barred from science fiction. Surely, then, when today the Church plays a vital role in the lives of many, her role in tomorrow should not be ignored. I realize that the danger of giving offense to various sections of your readership makes the portrayal of Faith a difficult one, and perhaps an issue for the most part best evaded.

Still, since violence in fiction is defended on the ground that violence exists in our daily life; since sadism and mental illness in fiction are likewise defended; since unhealthy sexual attitudes appear under the same plea—then does it not follow that religious truth has as much right of admission?

I am not going to urge you to publish more of the same, because the theme, alas, can easily become a controversial one in the unpleasant, destructive sense; and, as I have said above, I would rather see it avoided than forced in and mishandled. However, when it is considered, and handled as well as it was in "No Future in This", I cannot remain silent and thus give the impression of indifference.

RALPH ASHLEY, Brooklyn, New York

It has been pointed out in books on the art of writing, that truth is no defense when the question of realism and credibility come up in relation to fiction. The fact that certain types of events have happened, or do happen, in the real world is insufficient excuse for putting them into fiction; in fiction, events must have meaning.

IT SAYS HERE

Not that anything that happens in the real world is actually meaningless, but rather that much of what happens seems to have little meaning, or its meaning is obscure to us. In fiction, we demand the kind of order and organization and logic which we feel ought to exist in the world of real events, and which we constantly seek in our own lives. Thus, stories which are nothing more than "slices of life" may seem unreal, even if the author presents affidavits to the effect that, by gosh, these things did happen. And if such events are not given some kind of meaning, some interpretation by the author, then the reader will be unsatisfied, even if he can accept their plausibility.

For, Hamlet to the contrary, fiction does considerably more than merely "hold the mirror up to nature"; it rearranges nature. But the best fiction portrays ordered events in such a way as to give a feeling of reality.

MORE!

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Just finished the February issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* and enjoyed it very much, as I always do. I've never written to you before, because I felt, as Mrs. Wohl did, that maybe the men did have a monopoly on the letter section. Well, I'm a reader from way back and my one gripe is that the magazine just isn't big enough—not enough stories and none long enough.

Now, for the stories—

"Think No Evil"—I was just getting started, when the darn thing ended! Otherwise, pretty good.

"Why Should I Stop?"—Haven't figured that one out, yet. Guess my brain needs a shot of you know what!

"So Help Me!"—Can't wait to see who Quien Sabe is. Got my copy too late to enter the contest, but between you and me, 'til ole Quien Sabe is my kind of man—er, writer. He makes some of the other authors look like Little Lord what's his name! Can't spell it.

"Honor"—A bouquet of roses to Mr. Wilson! Let's have a novel by him.

"Love Me Again"—Kind of cute. Ona, what you need is a new husband! Ahá—room for thought there!

I always enjoy the letter dept. but agree with Mr. High. All that stuff about astronomical dynamics does get monotonous, and

[Turn Page]

SELLS ARTICLE BEFORE COMPLETING COURSE



"Before completing the N.I.A. Course, I sold a feature to Screenland Magazine for \$50. I am now working into the fiction field. Previous to enrolling, I had never written a line for publication."
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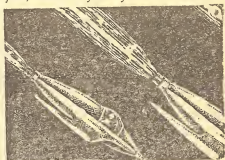
makes me feel so dumb. Mr. Chandler describes me perfectly when he refers to open minds that don't close on anything! Guess I could copy something from the encyclopedia and make him think my mind closed. Tut tut.

Bless you, Mrs. Wohl! Maybe us females will go down, but dadburn if we don't go down fighting! I'll bet there are lots of women SF readers, who, like me, never got up enough nerve to write a letter, when all those men would probably smile, or even laugh plumb out loud at us. O. K. you muscle-bound geniuses, just move over, us wimmen are coming aboard! I've been reading SF since I was 14—I'm an old lady of 27. During those 27 years, I've spent around four years in bed with heart trouble, and rheumatic fever. Needless to say, I have read everything from A to Z and I prefer science fiction any ole time.

Enuff for now, Mr. Lowndes. See you all in May—that's too long to wait—wish SFQ was a monthly. Almost forgot—Mr. Freas' cover is good! I kept turning back to it, and each time I liked it better.

MISS ONA MILLS,
Statesville, North Carolina

Better a magazine that leaves you waiting eagerly for the next issue, than one which just gives too much and comes out too often, wouldn't you say?



HINDSIGHT

Dear Editor:

So let me ask you three questions: What is a gopher ball? How do you, personally, decide that such and such a poem is a great one? How do you determine whether a story has what you call "wonderfulness".

Now let me answer. First of all, a gopher ball is any pitch—any kind whatsoever—which the batter slams into for a home run. Second, I figure that any poem is a great

[Turn To Page 96]



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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

poem which makes me feel like writing poetry myself, whether I actually try it or not. Third, if a story gives me a feeling of wonderfulness, then it's got that element, for me.

All a matter of hindsight.

Now a good pitcher can try to avoid throwing that gopher ball, and if he knows just what kind of pitch the batter he's facing usually latches onto for the full distance, and if his control doesn't slip, and if the batter isn't lucky enough to sock a different kind of pitch than the kind he usually makes the blast with, then there just ain't no gopher ball this time.

And if a poem doesn't make me feel sort of poetical myself, then I don't care a guddem how many servants have assured me that it is by golly one of the greatest ever written, it isn't that way for me.

And whether the characters in a story are falling all over themselves with wonder, or whether they just take the things that happen for granted, if nothing about the story seems wonderful to me, then so far as I'm concerned, the story just ain't got "wonderfulness".

But maybe a scribe who knew me well enough could figure out how to put that feeling into a story, any old story. It wouldn't even have to be science fiction or fantasy, if the author just knew what it was that gave me that feeling.

What I mean is, that you made a start toward defining "wonderfulness" in your editorial, and maybe you got as far as you could with a definition. You told us some of the things in certain stories that had the effect on you, yourself. And it's more or less admitted that these stories have had a similar effect on a lot of other people.

So the next thing to do, if authors want to get that feeling into their stories, is to try to isolate the elements—just the way you isolate the ingredients of a story as opposed, say, to the ingredients of non-fiction. What it is, in short, that *must* be there in order to make the work "story", by contemporary standards of story-making. Hardly any story has to have *all* the possible elements in order to qualify, but there is a sort of irreducible minimum.

I don't think it's plot, or characters, or even fantastic events, but a certain way of handling these things. Maybe you could get it, and I mean hit it every time, if you could

[Turn To Page 98]

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work out basic symbols which have particular psychological effects. They have to be universal enough so that nearly anybody will respond to them, and my guess is that they are symbols which are present in just about all kinds of stories, past or present—even back to mythology. Then you take these symbols and work them into the plot and situation and background in such a way that only an expert would notice that they were there at all. The rest of us, myself included because I'm no expert, would read the story and say by golly *that* sure gives you a feeling of wonderfulness.

You can't do it mechanically. Not that it would be impossible, but that it wouldn't read true. You lay out the plan as scientifically as you can, then you disguise all the mechanics, blend the elements in and involve *yourself* and your own feelings into the story so thoroughly that maybe by the time you're through you aren't just too sure exactly what you did do.

Some stories and some poems read as if the author had just made up a blueprint and then filled in blanks. Not only pulp stories, too. A lot of so-called literary works are all technique and no feeling.

CHESTER SWANN,
Kansas City, Kansas

Trouble is, the mechanics and techniques of writing fiction, or non-fiction, can be taught—but without initial talent, it's all sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Instruction can help talent where it is, but can't put it where it isn't.

PRIZE-WINNING LETTER IN THE "QUIEN SABE CONTEST"

by Michael Fogaris

Harry Bates is "Quien Sabe".

He first came to the science fiction fan's attention by becoming the editor of the Clayton Magazine, *Astounding Stories of Super Science* (January 1930 to March 1933). He was also editor of the Clayton *Strange Tales* (September 1931 to January 1933).

He was associated with the pen-name of "Anthony Gilmore", under which he collaborated with Desmond Winter Hall.

His best-known story is the novelet, "Farewell To The Master", which appeared under his own name in the October 1940 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*, and which appeared in the anthology, "Adventures In Time And Space", and which was

produced as a movie, "The Day The Earth Stood Still".

Additional stories of his are:

(under his own name)

"Alas, All Thinking!" (*Astounding Stories*, June 1935; also in the anthology, "The Other Worlds")

"A Matter of Size" (*Astounding Stories*, April, 1934; also in the anthology, "Adventures In Time And Space")

"A Matter of Speed" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, June 1941)

"Experiment of Dr. Sarconi" (*Thrilling Wonder Stories*, July 1940)

"Mystery of the Blue God" (*Amazing Stories*, January 1942)

"Death Of A Sensitive" (*Science Fiction Plus*, May 1935; also in the anthology, "Editor's Choice In Science Fiction")

"The Triggered Dimension" (*Science Fiction Plus*, December 1953)

(under the pen-name of "Anthony Gilmore", in collaboration with Desmond Winter Hall)

"The Tentacles From Below" (*Astounding Stories*, February 1931)

"Four Miles Within" (*Astounding Stories*, April 1931)

"Hawk Carse" (*Astounding Stories*, November 1931)

"The Affair Of The Brains" (*Astounding Stories*, March 1932)

"The Bluff Of The Hawk" (*Astounding Stories*, May 1932)

"The Passing Of Ku Sui" (*Astounding Stories*, November 1932)

"The Coffin Ship" (*Astounding Stories*, October 1933)

(under pen-name of "Anthony Gilmore", but written solely by himself)

"The Return Of Hawk Carse" (*Amazing Stories*, July 1942)

(under the pen-name of "A. R. Holmes")

"The Slave Ship From Space" (*Astounding Stories*, July 1931)

(under the pen-name of "H. G. Winter", in collaboration with Desmond Winter Hall)

"The Hands Of Aten" (*Astounding Stories*, July 1931)

"The Midget From The Island" (*Astounding Stories*, August, 1931)

"Seed Of The Arctic Ice" (*Astounding Stories*, February 1932)

"Under Arctic Ice" (*Astounding Stories of Super Science*, January 1933).



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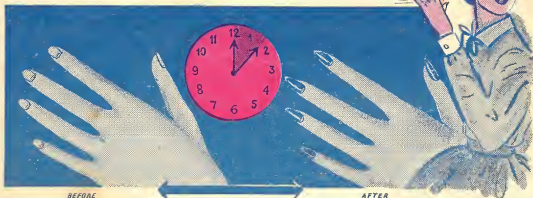
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